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HARVEST ADVENTURE



AT OCKWELLS MANOR, 1945

"As I sit writing this at the high window-seat in the afternoon sun in that Great Hall . . "

Photo Humphrey and Vera Joel

HARVEST ADVENTURE

ON FARMS AND SEA MARSHES OF BIRDS OLD MANORS AND MEN

BY

J. WENTWORTH DAY

AUTHOR OF

"SPORTING ADVENTURE" "THE DOG IN SPORT" "A FALCON ON ST PAULS"
"KING GEORGE V AS A SPORTSMAN" "THE MODERN FOWLER"
"SPORT IN EGYPT" "FARMING ADVENTURE" ETC.

I have seen on a dusty headland
All Babylon's boast and more,
When a boy on a jingling plough-horse
Rode home like an Emperor.

WILL H. OGILVIE, *In Royal Guise*



LONDON

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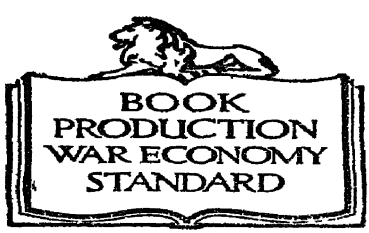
MARION, MY WIFE

FOR WHOM

". . . My heart no measure
Knows, nor other treasure."

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PREFACE

I BEGAN THIS SECOND SERIES OF " RURAL RIDES " IN THE HARVEST months of 1943 and ended it in the harvest time of 1945. And when a man travels, in time of war, some 10,000 miles on horse-back, by infrequent car, by rail, and on foot, through those parts of England which he loves the best he gathers mind-pictures which cannot fade. Some are for ever precious. They keep the beauty and stability of the England of the yeoman and the squire, the cottage and the manor-house, marsh and woodland and plough. Such pictures stand limned indelibly against the brutal background of war.

Others are neither beautiful nor precious nor particularly English. They are the pictures of the injustices, the waste and arrogance of some of the petty *gauleiters* and self-important officials created by the system of War Agricultural Executive Committees. These camp-followers of war are alien to the English countryside. They and their almost absolute powers, their strictly hidden accounts of public monies spent, their evictions and countless conflicting orders, smell of the Star Chamber. They are the negation of English principles of liberty.

Such a system, closely paralleling the structure of the Nazi Party in Germany, whereby " all who are not of us are beneath us," is foreign in conception, ultimately destructive in effect, and indefensible in peace. Now it is proposed to perpetuate it in peace.

The system, with the recently created Central Advisory Council of 1500 professors and 'scientists'—that over-worked word—is the thin end of the wedge of land nationalization. Let us not mistake that.

Lord Addison, Labour ex-Minister of Agriculture, has definitely stated, as an aim of policy, that " on the appointed day the title of all agricultural land shall pass to the State " [1]—with the brusquest and briefest form of compensation to the owners. The fulfilment of that policy only awaits more settled world conditions. Then one morning, " on the appointed day," the farmer-owners—who

[1] *Problems of a Socialist Government*, by C. R. Attlee, Sir Stafford Cripps, Hugh Dalton and others (Gollancz, 1934), p. 239.

represent 42 per cent. of all farmers—and the farm tenants will awake to find the State and its officials their lords and masters. Then will end the day of the immemorial English yeomanry, the backbone of our race. No man will have the right to work hard, save hard, and own his piece of land. No man will be free to change his landlord or leave his son a patrimony of sound acres full of the stored riches of his father's good husbandry. The very heart will go out of English land and the soul from its countryside. And all good men of courage and brains will seek their fortunes on the farms of freer Dominions.

The English countryside will, in our time, become the property of Whitehall, the appanage of officials and "scientific" sinecure-hunters, and the graveyard of that robust village individualism which has been the nursery of our greatness, the revivifier of our cities. The next few years will tell. The choice is ours.

I see this pledged threat to our ancient English land and rural liberties so plainly that, although I would much have preferred to write only those nostalgic pictures of an immemorial countryside of enduring beauty which are beloved by the town reader who sits with his, or her, feet up, and revels in ruralism at a discreet distance, I have considered it a duty, as an impartial observer, to set down some of the more unpleasant effects of this alien system.

So much, then, for the harsher highlights of this book. It does not pretend to be more than a scattered collection of country memories during the war. Some of the gentler memories of sport and old and peaceful houses are the more precious because we in East Anglia, like our London neighbours, were bombed and harried by night and day. But I have omitted as much of war as possible.

The war is won. The peace is here. The average man wants again the green days of hills and the blue days of seas, meadows where brooks run, the salt smell of tides, and the wet smell of woods in autumn, the urge of a galloping horse, and the strewn glories of sunsets over far English fields.

If, then, this book brings to many now returning home from war some echo of the old, unspoiled English countryside, if it wakes a pride in the life of village and field, and if it stirs that most ancient and potent love of all, the love of land, it will have reached its little goal.

J. WENTWORTH DAY

WICKEN, CAMBS.

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THE ENGLISHMAN

INSTINCTIVELY THE ENGLISHMAN IS NO MISSIONARY, NO conqueror. He prefers the country to the town and home to foreign parts. He is rather glad and relieved if only natives will remain natives and strangers strangers, and at a comfortable distance to himself. Yet outwardly he is most hospitable, and accepts almost anybody for the time being. He travels and conquers without a settled design because he has the instinct of exploration. His adventures are all external; they change him so little he is not afraid of them.

He carries his English weather in his heart wherever he goes, and it becomes a cool spot in the desert and a steady and sane oracle amongst all the deliriums of mankind.

Never since the heroic days of Greece has the world had such a sweet, just, boyish master. It will be a black day for the human race when scientific blackguards, conspirators, churls and fanatics manage to supplant him.

GEORGE SANTAYANA, *Soliloquies in England*

I. MOONLIGHT RIDE TO ORFORD

The Poets of Woodbridge—" Old Fitz " and Tennyson—Across Suffolk Heaths to Boadicea's Lost Village—The Gipsy in the Moonlight—In the Land that lies by Itself

He rode as lonely and as free
As a ship that sails an empty sea,
Blithe as the roving honey-bee
That on wind-lifted wings boomed over
The sunlit verges white with clover.

FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG, *The Island*

I CAME INTO WOODBRIDGE ON A LATE SUMMER EVENING OF RED clouds and high swallows. Robert, that wise old hunter with the chestnut coat and mild eye, had been boxed up from Colchester, and by the time he was out of the station and I had called in at the Crown for a word with that stout and jolly landlord who used to keep the Saracen's Head at Dunmow—where they had not only Tudor rooms and beautiful oak, but stabling for thirty-four horses—it was late evening and the sun mellow on salt water.

There is a steelyard in a narrow old street of plastered houses in this little town of Woodbridge ; it is one of the finest in all England, sheer beauty of good ironwork, and still fit to weigh a wagon-load of wool. There are lovely old houses and overhanging eaves, orange and yellow walls of plaster, and shy little courtyards with hidden gardens in bloom, wisteria climbing, and cats sunning. There is, or was, an old gaol in the middle of the street at Melton, with monstrously thick walls and many odd little windows. Long since it was converted to a malting, but down by the Old Ship Inn, which they built before 1672, there is still a room where the Independents met and fiercely declared their religion.

Woodbridge, to me, means mind-pictures of FitzGerald and " Posh " sailing their little boat *The Scandal*, which Fitz so named since it was, he said, the staple local product—" Posh " in his top-hat and " Old Fitz " wandering in a leisurely, half-asleep, half-cynical

sort of way from Little Grange, hidden behind its tall trees in a sweet, small garden, down to the bar-room at the Bull to talk salt-water language to sailors and poetry with Tennyson. A figure to remember and love, in his " old Inverness cape, double-breasted flowered satin waistcoat, slippers on feet, and with a handkerchief, very likely, tied over his hat."

I can see him in his rooms " over Berry, the gunsmiths' shop on Market Hill," in the old-fashioned garden at Little Grange with its Victorian sweet williams and stocks, its ivied dormers and beds of blazing geraniums, and I see him, too, nursing back the shade of old Omar to living language beside this sweet Deben river " on which the sun always seems to shine." Or sailing down these quiet salt tides, when, as he said, " I am happiest going in my little Boat round the Coast to Aldboro' with some Bottled Porter and some Bread-and-cheese and some good rough Soul who works the Boat and chews his Tobacco in Peace. An Aldboro' sailor, talking of my Boat, said, ' She go like a Wiolin, she do! ' What a pretty conceit, is it not? "

Woodbridge is a fine town for poets—FitzGerald, Tennyson, who visited him, Crabbe, who loved it as much or more than Aldeburgh, and Bernard Barton, the coal merchant who turned poet—a good one too, though no one reads his verses nowadays. I like to think of Charles Keene strutting up and down in front of the ivied walls and dormer windows of Little Grange, playing his bagpipes before breakfast, and of the landlord of the solid Bull remarking in his solid Suffolk way, when Fitz told him that he should be flattered that Tennyson had visited his house, " Dessay, but he didn't fare to know much about hosses! "

There is a bland and lovely old town hall at Woodbridge, with a Georgian-cum-Dutch look about it and a most noble sweep of dog-legged outer staircase to lead your feet to its high-windowed door and your eye to the Dutch-looking gable above. And there is always the quay, with its smell of ships and mud and salty water and its whisper of Dutchmen and the great fight at Sole Bay. There too I found an old friend of other days, Clifford Hoskins, whom all good thriller-readers know as Richard Keverne, living most snugly in a barge. It is no bad way to live—all the comforts of a house and none of the rates.

It was in Woodbridge that poor John Upson, the glover, composed that philosophic epitaph which is the best farewell to life that any man could want. They convicted him of felony in 1774, and



BUTLEY ABBEY

"Grey and gaunt and beautiful, its windows winking in the sun."
Photo "Country Life"



SUFFOLK

"On a spring morning when . . . larks sang."
Photo Douglas Went, Brightlingsea



LAND AND WATER: THE AUTHOR (*above*) WITH MASTER ROBERT II AND A ROADSIDE FRIEND, AND (*below*) WITH ERNEST PARR ON ADVENTURERS FEN

Photos Douglas Went and Sport and General

cast him into prison. There he hanged himself " with his garter," but before so doing he wrote :

> Farewell, vain world, I've had enough of thee,
> And now am careless what thou say'st of me.
> Thy smiles I court not, nor thy frowns I fear.
> My cares are past, my heart lies easy here.
> What faults they find in me take care to shun,
> And *look at home*, enough is to be done.
>
> POOR JOHN THE GLOVER
> *June* 26, 1774

Woodbridge owes a lot to Thomas Seckford, who, dying in 1587, left to the town lands, almshouses, charities, and bequests. Seckford Hall is a grand old place well worth seeing, and, for the interest of ornithologists, the Seckford Room has a good collection of Suffolk birds.

But we had no time for birds or ancient manors that night. It was ten or twelve miles to our lodging at Orford, and it would be high moonlight in an hour. Curlew were feeding in the salt channel under the road bridge and, above it, Sutton Heath was windy and empty in the half-light. An owl was quartering the heather, and not a soul or a light in sight. I was glad that no gibbet stood, as once it did on Rushmere Heath near Ipswich, to rattle dead bones in the sea-wind or swing a dry and leering corpse.

It may be that, thinking of the vanished gibbet, or of Margaret Catchpole's great ride to London which started not far off, at Nacton, on the Orwell—where, by the way, the first midnight steeplechase was also run—that I missed the track. It is easy enough to do so by day and far easier at night with a horse new to the place and one's own memories a few years out of date.

That half-hour or so between sunset and moon-rising is the most deceptive in all the twenty-four. The sun went down in a flat band of gold and red. The heath turned from brown and gold to plum colour and indigo, and then stark black. Trees arched the road and a few stars broke out. It was " 'ammer, 'ammer, 'ammer on the 'ard 'igh road " and hope for the moon. A long village, full of harvest smells and bats, came and went. It was Eyke, but I did not know it. Had I been on the right road I should, by then, have been past Sutton Hoo, where they found the Saxon longship with its gold and treasure, over Sutton Walks, and into Sutton Village. But not a man, woman, or child was about. All Suffolk was indoors, harvest-weary, eating kippers and going to bed. Only the owls and a cock partridge, grating like a corncrake, were awake.

Then the moon came up, a demure half-moon with a face as pure as a child's. It was white and silver as the distant sea. It mapped the old gnomish trees on the white road ahead and made bobbing rabbits look as big as dogs. The air was heavy with hot harvest scents—ripe wheat and barley and a smell of clover or sainfoin, with a touch of resinous fir-woods, standing black as cut velvet across a field.

I put the horse over a bank and into the headland of a stubble and jogged on. It was easier for his feet. Riding at night is one of the greatest joys on earth provided there are no rabbit-holes. The world and the scents of the night are yours—all the white witchery of moon and the black magic of old gaunt trees, all the sibilant noises of birds on quick wing and the small feet of animals who go by night without fear of man. They do not fear the horse, and so you may see much that is denied by day—the rabbit sitting, ears cocked, erect as a parson, by the hedgeside ; field-mice squeaking high and thin ; moorhens, those rovers of the night, clicketing overhead on their dark wanderings from pool to pool ; perhaps a nightjar churring his ghostly song or floating like a moth down the side of an old, mysterious wood. There are rats pattering about the stacks, and the high, blood-curdling " skree-ee " of a yellowy-white barn owl on the hunt.

Robert's hooves made a muffled thud, thud, on the dry stubble field. Neither animals nor birds took notice. It was a leisurely sound, the sound of a happily travelling horse. Had it been the wild hoof-beats of a gallop those listening ears would have passed on the tale of terror and the ground and hedges would have swallowed them.

High overhead, in the starred velvet, came the clear whistle of stone curlew. They, the Norfolk plover of the long yellow legs and luminous eyes, the most romantic of all birds of the night, were on their own territory here, on these high, wild heaths. This lonely land had known the Neolith knapping his flints, the Viking burying his kingly dead, the Dane marching inland, the smuggler running his cargo behind horses whose hooves were muffled in sacks, and the highwaymen waiting for the Georgian squire homing in his rumbling old coach from Ipswich Market or a rout at the Great White Horse. The bustard saw most of them. Now the bustard has gone. But the stone curlew remains. His wild whistle is the night-chord of the heaths.

So musing, with an eye open for rabbit-holes, we came to a wood, tall and dark. It threw the road in shadow, and Robert's hooves

rang eerily in that dark canyon. Ahead a gleam of open road showed white as a splash of water. Trotting on, there suddenly loomed on the left, facing a stark heath, an embattled gatehouse, ivied and crenellated, white and challenging in the moon. It stood in its frame of tall oaks and dark pines, like a castle in a fairy-tale, a cut from a Walter Scott novel. I recognized it—the gatehouse to Rendlesham Hall, a Victorian sham from the neo-Gothic days, miraculously transformed by the moon.

The entrance was rutted by lorry wheels. Tank tracks cut up the heath opposite. Fences were broken and down. Mud, dry and crusted, piled up by the roadside. Ahead the road was cut and broken. A few soldiers lounged at a tent door.

It was here in this tiny village, in this land that lies by itself between sea and heaths, that, long before the Normans, the Kings of the East Angles had their palace, including that "mongrel Christian," as old Fuller calls him, Redwald, who kept both an altar for God and a place for idols.

I thought of the change in this estate since Lord Rendlesham sold it at the end of the last war. When the sale was announced of the twenty thousand or so acres tenant farmers and cottagers held a mass meeting at which they begged their landlord not to sell. But death duties, those Lloyd Georgian millstones round the landowner's neck and blight on agriculture, forced the sale. To-day the villagers still talk of the good days "under the old lord." I wonder if any mass meeting would ever be held anywhere to beg a War Agricultural Committee or the Forestry Commission not to relinquish their hold on the land. I think not.

My mistake was plain enough now. I had come miles out of my way all round the northern edge of a triangle whose eastern base was my object—that old sea-wise town of Orford crouching at the foot of its gaunt castle keep, its face to the sea, its back to the blind heaths and deep woods.

Well, thought I, the moon is up, the night full of scents, and I have a fancy to visit once again the lost village of Boadicea, the Iceni Hoo which to-day is Iken. I will see Iken Church by moonlight and Iken Reach in full flood. If the worst happens I can sleep in a stack and Robert may sleep on his feet, with a hobble to bid him from straying. So on we went, over Tunstall cross-roads and into the heart of what was then a battle school of three thousand and more acres. Not a soul challenged me. Homing soldiers from the Green Man shouted "'Night, Buffalo Bill," and that was all.

The road ahead was bright in the moon, and lonely. But there might be sentries about, so, with a fair sense of where Iken, that tiny hamlet, lay, by the forgotten estuary, I plunged into a maze of little side-roads and took a narrow, sandy lane. The tall bracken brushed my stirrups, and the rabbits ran ahead in the white moon. Robert's hooves made a sliding, silken shuffle in the sand. Across Tunstall Heath, ghostly and quiet, down by a wood where firs smelt hot and tangy and a cat-owl took sudden, shrieking alarm. And then came a cold draught on the night wind, the sharp, salt smell of the sea. The Alde, that strange river which is all salt water for twelve miles and seldom in all its estuarine wanderings more than a mile or so from the main sea, lay to the left. I glimpsed it through thin firs, rode by an inn and tiny, thatched cottages, which is all there is of Iken, surprised a black cat in a gateway with a rabbit, and turned suddenly left, down a road I had not trodden for years.

At the end, alone in its belt of trees, high on a bluff, silent with its gravestones and its dead, stood the little church. Beyond, the whole lagoon of this wide upper reach of the Alde gleamed like beaten silver, bank-full, near a mile wide. Here, or near by, St Botolph, who was both bishop and abbot and the eponymous patron of Boston, had his monastery of Ikanhoe in about A.D. 660, a fact forgotten by all but ecclesiastical archæologists.

Curlew whistled and plover wheeled and wept. Duck went over on whispering wings, and the " Whe-oh " of early widgeon was clear and shrill. As Robert picked his way through a gate and delicately down the side of that steep little bluff to the strip of sand a herd of feeding curlew took off with a rattle and thunder of wings, a whirl of whistles. Half the water seemed to rise in a gabble of quackings and skirling. Fat mallard ' quarked,' and teal sprang with their sibilant whistle. I sat in the saddle and looked at the dark woods across the water round Captain Vernon-Wentworth's mansion of Blackheath, and thought of the day when Bill Urmston and a friend, ramming a punt-gun cartridge into the breech, exploded it and nearly killed themselves on this lonely stretch of water. One lost an arm and the other, I believe, a leg. But for the quick sense of that grand seaman-fowler, Victor Brinkley, and the accident of a nurse being at Blackheath both would be dead to-day. Brinkley carried them both on his back across a hundred yards or more of sucking salt mud, a Herculean feat.

I sat a moment in the saddle, thinking of this and of the old decoy pond in the marshes, of Thackeray's wicked Lord Hertford and

Sir Richard Wallace, and of all the long history of this Sudbourne estate and its owners, then turned my horse's head south. We had miles to go, barbed wire to avoid, possible mines to gamble on, and Lord knew what other hazards a battle school might provide.

Under a pollard oak near Raydon Hall a dark figure stood. Robert cocked his ears. "You ride late, master," said a voice. "And you walk late," said I.

"Have you a job on the farm you can give a poor gipsy boy," said the voice of the unknown.

"I've no farm and no job to give," said I. "Are you looking for a rabbit or a job?"

"No, no—oh, no, master! I'm no rabbiting gipsy. Just a tinker-boy," and he came out into the moon. A tall, thin, black-haired boy of about seventeen with a long face which would have been pale but for the tint of Suffolk summer suns.

We talked, and as I like gipsies he told me they had come up from Kent, through Essex, and were away up to Norfolk. He knew the old Priests' Lane—the sunken lane of badgers on Bottledown Hill near my temporary Essex home at Herongate, the lane that runs as the pilgrims once walked it, from Mucking Steps, where once they say were stepping-stones across the Thames in a line to Canterbury. It runs, as I say, from Mucking Steps to Ely Cathedral, though you will by no means find every mile of it to-day since the plough and the hard road have robbed it for centuries of its ancient rights of way.

"I do not like most of the Essex farmers," said he. "They do not want the gipsy boys. They told me I should be in the Army. But I am only sixteen. My brother, he is a gunner-soldier, but I—I am too young. Do you think I should be in the Army, master?"

"Not yet, boy," said I. "Next time you remind the farmers that half of 'em have been quick enough to keep their own sons out of it."

He laughed ruefully. "Ah! We shall be in Norfolk soon. Norfolk, ah! That is gipsy country. We can camp there and men will buy our goods and give us pots to mend and a rabbit to eat. It is a good place, Norfolk."

I agreed that there was none better than that broad and open-hearted country—gentlemen's country and gipsys' country, and the two are not far apart. I gave him a shilling for luck, we shook hands, and I rode on, the tall olive-tinted boy standing in the

moonlit road, his heart hurt by the gibes of the Essex farmers—he, the ancient Egyptian, the wanderer as old as time.

Nought but a scolding owl and a saddleback gull who barked above me like a dog worried our hoof-steps until, at last, near midnight, we came to Orford and the still, silent beauty of the North Sea, lying far to the east like hammered silver : sheep baaed in a white bowl of mist on the near marshes, and cattle stood humped under willow-trees, white-leaved in the moon. The castle keep towered grim, silent with its Norman ghosts.

The stable door was open. Beans were ready in a bag—rare and noble hospitality—the straw was warm, and Robert's final nuzzle on my coat-sleeve said, " Not quite the way we meant to come, but a rare good night and worth it."

And so, eating bread-and-cheese and drinking Bass in a silent hall, full of stuffed ducks and hawks in gleaming cases, thought I also. The rest was sleep and curlew crying under the moon.

II. THE WISE MEN OF SUFFOLK

At the Jolly Sailor—The Wild Man of Orford—On Bitterns, Night Herons, Eagles, and such Rare Fowl—The Scholar in the Gatehouse—The Medieval Glory of Butley Priory—The Haunted Forest and the Football Ground of the Gods

> . . . His chief delight
> Was hunting fox from noon to night. . . .
> He loved the English countryside:
> The wine-leafed bramble in the ride,
> The lichen on the apple-trees,
> The poultry ranging on the lees,
> The farms, the moist earth-smelling cover.
>
> JOHN MASEFIELD, *Reynard the Fox*

I WOKE TO A SEA-BRISK MORNING, THE NORTH SEA RUNNING WHITE caps off the Lantern Marshes. White and black the lighthouse gleamed in the sun, like a new Roman pharos set to light and guard the coast. Soldiers sat high in the narrow windows of the Castle, sunning themselves, cigarettes in mouth, whistling while they cleaned buttons and buckles. In such manner had men-at-arms whistled and cleaned arms and buckles all down the centuries from that unsmiling tower.

The great Norman keep dominates one end of this old and tiny town, and a gauntly beautiful church lords the other. The tower of the church is ruined and broken, for it gave up hope and collapsed on a sunshiny day a hundred years ago or so, taking bells, belfry, and tower with it. The choir arcade too is roofless and ruined. Orford has never bothered to rebuild. Between castle and church is a sunny square with a butcher's shop, a baker, a post office which sells sweets and bootlaces, an hotel which calls itself grandly the Crown and Castle and had, in the days when I first knew it, two whole walls covered with the stuffed and challenging denizens of marsh and foreshore. They have gone into storage.

Across the square the Ship, an ancient inn, with low, beamed ceilings, a pew-like bar, and a wavy red roof, sells most excellent beer and knows all the talk of salt water and farmland.

But if you turn down opposite the church you find a road which goes unwaveringly, of set purpose, straight as a die for the salt water. It is a raised road, a causeway, as though to remind the

passer-by that the sea might break in and flood all those green marshes full of horses on the left and swamp to their window-sills all those low cottages which crouch like little old women by its wide green verge. This road has a saddler's shop, full of leather smells and horse trappings, and another shop which sells newspapers and apples and tea and sweets and candles. And it has also the Jolly Sailor.

Beyond the Jolly Sailor it goes marching dead on to the quay, with its great wooden piles that would hold a steamer, its stranded boats and grey-painted duck-punts, its tall warehouses that look like all sea mysteries wrapped in one, and its eternal gurgle of tides and scream of gulls. By the quay is that square, white, comfortable house where lives Mr Figg, who is a retired Anglo-Indian with an eclectic taste for yachting and partridge-shooting and, what is more, holds the ancient and exceedingly honourable office of Port Reeve—which is Saxon and no foreign nonsense from Normandy—of this ancient and most notably honourable port of Orford, which, mark you, sent its men and a ship to aid the Agincourt campaign and, later, to fight the Spanish Armada. It had Lord Wentworth to look after its sea-defences, and a castle to keep the countryside in order and a Mayor and Corporation to keep its inhabitants in order until some prosaic persons did away with them.

But on that particular brisk, sea-windy morning I did not get beyond the Jolly Sailor. Now, it is an excellent and a worshipful thing that inns in country lanes and market towns and thirsty villages should open early in the morning, for in the country people are early out of bed, briskly at their work, and have earned a thirst, and a right to it, by ten of the clock. So, having risen late and done no work, I turned into the Jolly Sailor. No right-thinking man would pass it. For did it not have a landlord, Steve Harper, of so notable a mien and so jolly and prescient an eye, that T. C. Dugdale, that good Suffolk artist, who lived at Iken in the quiet meadows until the military rooted him out and put tanks in his place, painted a picture of him. Behold, it was hung in the Royal Academy in London and brought a breath of salt air, a whisper of country common sense, to that hot and tired metropolis.

And has not the Jolly Sailor also its incredible and enchanting Little Dogs—dogs as small as a large mouse—so small that one who is depicted slaying a rat seems a canine Lilliput killing a Brobdingnagian rodent? For, let it be whispered, they are stuffed. Some Orford sailor wandering in China or Peru, or such outlandish places

where such tiny dogs might be found, brought them home, and there they are—a perpetual joy to those who, like me, have childish minds for little things.

But it was not Steve Harper, who, alas, is dead, or Little Dogs, or even, quite, Mr Adnams' most authentic ale which took me to the Jolly Sailor's arms that morning. I wanted to see Vic Brinkley. Now, Vic is a man and a half. I am not sure if there were Brinkleys in Orford when they built the Castle, but I would lay a skip full of bees that a Brinkley caught that " wild man of the sea," the hairy Merman with arms and legs and a body covered with fish-scales and a rough wiry beard, whom they took in the nets off Orford one morning in the thirteenth century and kept mewed up in the Castle, making him turn spits and occasionally torturing him to make him speak, until one day he escaped and went away to sea and then, most inexplicably, came back again. I have always thought that he was no more than one of those whiskered old grey seals you see lying fatly on sand-banks in the Wash, but it is too late to argue now.

The Brinkleys have always been in at those sort of games, whether it was fishing, or longshore fowling, or punt-gunning, or going out in the lifeboat to save lives in the teeth of winter gales. Vic has saved more than one life himself.

He was not there, but the coastguard was and we talked. Presently Vic came in. He is middle-sized, like a boxer, with shoulders that would carry a field-gun, a face of bronze, eyes with the sea in them, and a quiet, sure voice. The posturing half-breeds and vulgar figureheads of Hollywood could take a back-seat and lessons in both manners and manliness from such men of the coast.

Vic had been up all night, watching for bombers or anything the North Sea might send. We talked of birds and fish.

" There'll be plenty o' fish after the war—more than we can catch. There always is after a war, for they get a breather and can breed while the fighting's on. Same after the last war. Fish increased like billy-o ! Then every one went mad—over-fished, and glutted the markets. Some of them big trawler-owners up Grimsby and Fleetwood way fair murdered the fish. Then they had to go farther afield for 'em—right up to the White Sea and Barents Sea and off Iceland."

" Well, we must limit the size of the net-mesh and limit the size of trawlers too," said I. " It's like preserving game birds. If you didn't stop poaching there'd be none."

"Ah! Jesso! You're right. Limit the size of the mesh in the net so that the little 'uns can get through and escape. I've seen tons of little fish thrown on the land and ploughed in for manure because they were too small for market or else the market was glutted."

"So have I," I added. "Sprats by the ton at Tollesbury and Brightlingsea and white fish at the back of Yarmouth. How did you do with the ducks last winter?"

"Fair. Fair. Not good. Widgeon a-plenty, but I'd no time, what with night watchin' and cartridges short. But we've had some bags up this river. You know that. Sixty-two teal and widgeon and geese one night, with an ordinary twelve-bore in a snowstorm and seventy-nine one day with the big gun.

"That 'minds me. I've got something up at mine that I've seft [1] for you. I'll bring it up to yours after you've had your supper. Put it along o' your other birds. My old dad shot that on this river fifty years ago in a rare, hard winter, and I've never seen one since." He did bring it up, and I treasure it still—a cock smew in his full grandeur of white waistcoat, black saddle and half-collar, dove-grey stomach, bright golden eye, and cockatoo crest.

We walked down to the quay, looked over a punt or two, talked of the shark which was so foolish as to come close inshore and allow itself to be shot from the quay, and discussed the terns who nest on the Lantern Marshes and all along the long shingle beaches, quite unperturbed by the near-by air station and its practice bombs.

Then I walked back to call in and see that superb artist of birds and mice and marshes, Miss Winifred Austen. She lives in a sunny old house which turns its face to the cattle-marsh and the sea—a shy, grey-haired woman with an agile mind, a seeing eye, and the pencil of an angel.

We sat in her sunny sitting-room with its delicate etchings—reed warblers, owls, field-mice, Suffolk sea-shores, tits on fruit-trees, a wagtail in a roadside pool—and talked of birds. Of the golden eagle which she had seen, most fantastically, out of a window of the village bus. It was in Sudbourne Park, being mobbed mercilessly by rooks, a happening which should surprise no one with eyes in his head, for eagles, falcons, owls, and wildfowl all pass up this eastern sea verge on their passage to and from Africa, the marismas of Spain, and the mountains and firths of Findhorn and Forth. At least half a dozen other golden eagles have been seen in Suffolk since the day when Pennant recorded the first in 1783. We talked of the

[1] Saved.

rough-legged buzzards which she had seen more than once in the neighbourhood—and I can imagine no likelier place than those wide heaths and deep woods—of the merlins who haunt the thousand acres of Wantisden Heath, the spoonbills who come almost every spring and autumn to the flats of the Alde, the bitterns and bearded tits who have been seen in the great reed-beds at Thorpeness, and, most enchanting of all, the night heron who appeared one day, groping about with his long white neck plumes, straight from Hungary, or maybe Spain, and settled himself in his old-man, detached sort of way in the branches of a tree right outside her windows; and of how he flew off each evening to join the cattle and sheep on the grass marsh opposite, walking about among them, picking up ticks, lice, beetles, and leather-jackets. He spent most of the day hunched up in the branches of his tree, out of the high lights of the sun, and went out in the evening, a short, melancholy "squak" the only sound of his whereabouts.

One day a farmer brought her a wounded bittern which she soon tamed. It took its food regularly and would go into its characteristic attitudes on the carpet, fluffing out its tawny, striped breast when alarmed and presenting a most terrifying sight. Or it would stick its beak straight up into the air, contract its feathers and body into a thin straight line, and do its utmost to look like a spear of dead reeds. It lived quite happily until she sent it to the Zoo, where it pined away and died in 1937.

We talked of avocets, which she had seen on the Alde, and I told her of the pair who nested two years running on my old shoot, Langenhoe Hall Marshes, in Essex, just before this war, until some one shot the young ones by mistake. And of the flamingo which had been seen on the Alde, and that other flamingo—or was it the same one?—which Jesse Pullen, of West Mersea, and others saw fly over Mersea Church when they were muffling the bells for King Edward the Seventh's funeral in 1910. It was shot soon after by Walter Linnett, the professional fowler of Bradwell-juxta-Mare, the man who first taught me to use and fire a punt and big gun on salt water.

It is my ambition one day to see a goshawk on those wild Suffolk heaths and marshes. They have been seen before—at Somerleyton, at Aldeburgh, at Butley, and not less than three in a year at Rendlesham in 1868.

That is one of the enduring pleasures of bird-watching and living in the country with an open eye. You never know what will turn

up. Many more rare birds come to English marshes and woodlands than ever get into print. The carefully noted records which appear in county bird histories and the letters to *The Field* tell only a tithe of the tale of birds which pause in this country on their high air passagings from Arctic snows and Baltic pine forests, from Dutch fens and Danish and Pomeranian moors down to the hot, watery wastes of the Landes, the broad lagoons of the Guadalquivir, the sandy dunes of the Coto Donana, and the rivers and deserts of Africa. Ornithologists of the museum and county record types are too often inclined to be didactic and positive.

I looked at an exquisite etching of an owl. " Yes, almost my favourite," Miss Austen said. " I love owls. They bring me luck. I had a brown owl once as a pet, and it was the most adorable old thing—rather like a wise, fluffy old gentleman with a discreet past. I'm certain owls are bringers of good luck, aren't you ? "

" The Greeks thought so, and Pallas would have agreed with you," said I. " The Red Indians thought so, too—and what a pity we haven't preserved more of their bird mythology. I never kill any owl except the Little Owl, and I can't forgive him for his day and night murders of small birds."

We talked of the great eagle owl which that delightful and scholarly ornithologist, J. L. Bonhote, used to keep in a vast wooden pen at his house at Fen Ditton, near Cambridge, and the Scops Owl, that minute and engaging one, and of the great brown owls and long-eared owls who are the authors and originators of half the ghosts and banshees in history, and of the " Grand Duc " himself, the tawny, eagle-eyed terror of Nordic woods and French forests.

Then it was time to be getting on, for I had to take tea with an old acquaintance of earlier years, a man in whom history and scholarliness and gentleness and wisdom have found an abiding place for the space of one man's life.

I went by lonely roads through great woods and over a salt stream, deep hid in brown reed-beds fit for bittern or otter, by a lonely white mill-house with a broad, swallow-dappled stream at its back, black-and-white cattle dipping their muzzles, a little girl herding waddling geese, peewits looking for worms, and its windows gazing through red geraniums down the Butley river to the sandy hill by Chillesford with its lonely firs, and beyond, the sea and the smoke-smudge of a convoy, hull down.

And, after that, down a sandy lane where a sad little church with a thatched roof lifted its forlorn face to great open barley

fields rimmed by tall, windy firs. Through their gaunt trunks the red sky of the afternoon flooded a wild and unearthly light.

It was good, in such a lonely land,

> Only to walk and walk and to stem my soul and amaze it,
> A day with the stone and the sparrow and every marvellous thing.

At the bottom of that sandy lane stood great forest trees, and in a sudden opening, across a flat plat of bleached grasses, sat the house—grey and gaunt and beautiful, its windows winking in the sun, lonely in its tall tapestry of woods, a seat of

> Ancient gold of pride and passion
> Wrecked like treasure on a shore.

There it stood, its central door open to the questing wind, above it that mighty entablature on the walls where, in an incomparable display of heraldic beauty, were cut in stone the arms of England and France, the three crowns of East Anglia, the Passion, and the Holy Roman Empire, with Leon and Castile.

And below them the blazonry of great East Anglian families—Howard and De Vere, Bohun and Botetourt, Beauchamp and de Warenne; Wake, Mortimer, and De Ros; Bardolf, Huntingfield, and Fitzalan, and, with them, Ufford, Colvile, and Rosselyn; Glanvile, Lade, and Danvilliers, and still others whose claims are divided and doubtful.

This gatehouse of Butley is the mighty fragment of the once-great Augustinian priory founded by Ranulf de Glanvile in 1171. It owes its renaissance from a Victorianized ruin to a lovely house, full of medieval grace, to Dr Montague Rendall, whom Old Wykehamists remember as their Headmaster. To him the public owes a debt as one of the earliest and most scholarly Governors of the B.B.C.

I stood for a moment gazing at that grey and beautiful monastic house, set above the bulrushes and lilies of its twin fishponds. The red sun of afternoon warmed its grey ashlar and blue flints. The slim pillars and arch of skeleton ruins stood against the dimmer background of a stackyard where wagons creaked and Suffolk voices came quietly. The central block of ashlar and blue-grey flints is flanked by huge buttresses. Lancet windows, pierced and foliated, give grace and light. Over the central doorway is the most remarkable display of arms in the world—thirty-five shields of the four great Christian Powers and of the great nobles of the fourteenth century, cut out, clear and bold, in freestone, as fresh as the day they were done six hundred and twenty years ago.

I stood and looked at a scene which might have stepped straight from the Middle Ages when, despite wars and feudal strife, there was less wholesale carnage and murderous ' progress,' more peace, and truer, simpler values than we know to-day in this world of science gone mad and beauty crucified.

I thought of the stark unloveliness of skyscrapers, the crude squares and oblongs of ' progressive ' architects, the miserably garish, overheated rabbit-runs which are Mayfair flats, and wondered quite what we have done to flatter ourselves that we are so much wiser than our forbears. What, indeed, when science and lack of plain godliness have seen an average of half a million men killed in Europe for each year of the last twenty-five years—the fruit of two wars for ' civilization.'

Inside, the vaulted chamber which was once the main entrance to the Priory and is now a lovely and gracious room, thirty-three feet by twenty-four, was alight with sunlight, scented by roses, and tea was ready. Tea at a long Italian oak table at which cardinals had eaten, sitting on red leather chairs as old as the bones of Philip of Spain.

Dr Rendall is eighty-two and the sort of man whom boys love with an awesome reverence until they become grown men, when they suddenly discover a wise, a precious, and a humorous friend. It is a peculiar gift which seems to be reserved almost for the few schoolmasters who have real knowledge and therefore are not pedagogues, and for the fewer dons who are not precious pedants. Lord Lloyd had the quality in a classic, clear-cut, proconsul degree. Lord Milner had it. That great scholar and horseman Dr W. H. D. Rouse has never lost it, but he miraculously adds the smell of the stables to the odour of the library.

Tall, white-haired, with a whimsical eye, a smile that was young when J. K. Stephen was an undergraduate, Dr Rendall has a scholar's stoop but an athlete's walk. A mind too fresh to despise sentiment, too wise to be clever, too young to forswear romance, too full of sound knowledge to be of the ' intellectuals '—those camp-followers at the skirts of true learning.

We talked of many things, away from these fantastic days when

> Slaughter below and smoke above
> And death and hate and hell declare
> That men have found a thing to love,

things away from wars and bombs by night and the petty tyrannies of the little mean bureaucrats who walk in fools' authority while better men die.

We talked of days in Italy before the war, and the colours on Italian hills and Ionian isles, of Genoa and Naples, " two of the worst cities ; " of Sinai and the unbelievable beauty of the desert hills, the blues and pinks and sudden ugly streaks of black which crash across the faces of the djebels ; of Winchester and its water-meadows and grey St Cross and the Almoner with his bread and mug of beer for the destitute traveller.

We talked of Wykehamists whom he had taught as boys ; of Wavell, " always a strong character and a lover of good English ; " of Dowding, the head and brains of the Battle of Britain [1] (" we called him ' Stuffy ' then, and he's ' Stuffy ' to-day—clear head and a true concept of religion. He would always be an inspiration to men ") ; of Gerard Lymington,[2] " that long-legged, red-headed boy, very active. A true Wallop. He should make a great man some day."

" He would make a greater Minister of Agriculture than Hudson any day," I put in.

Of Brendan Bracken, that flamboyant product of democracy but not of Winchester, he said ; " I wonder if I should stand in awe of him now that he is a Cabinet Minister. I think not." I think not too.

We talked of Cyprus, with its stickily scented groves, black sails in the sun going out of Limasol Harbour ; of New Zealand, more British than the British, where they have kept values and traditions which we were throwing away till this war crucified us ; and of that unforgettable fount of architectural knowledge, Dr Cranage, who once declared that this gatehouse is unique in Europe.

On the white and sand-coloured walls hung pictures—Nevinson's grim and sombre Tommy carrying in a wounded man, and Sir William Richmond's coolly lovely water-colour of cloisters in a palazzo, water-dim under the hot Italian sun, " done in a frenzy of visions on a three-months honeymoon, when his eyes were open to all loveliness."

Heads of oribi and gerenuk and Sinaitic ibex given him by Edward Pease and Edward North Buxton hung on the walls. The desert animals were one with the desert colour of the walls, their ancient lineage was at home under this vaulted roof of thirteenth-century England.

There is a niche full of lovely china in those cool walls, and a little light to show it. " When I feel lonely in this old house—so very

[1] Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Dowding. [2] Now Earl of Portsmouth.

old—I eat my meal in front of it and light them up. They never tire me."

There is a lovely fourteenth-century piscina in another room, a room which was once probably used for the dispensing of alms, although it is not the almoner's room proper. That, a vaulted chamber some twenty feet square, has been turned into a library. The piscina was, until 1926, used most barbarously as a Victorian fire-grate, but luckily without injuring it.

We walked outside and contemplated that unique display of arms. It has no equal. The display at Kirkham Priory in Yorkshire comes near it in quality but behind it in quantity.

"Lovely brick—lovely and unrepeatable," said Dr Rendall. "Mary Tudor must have gazed on it a good many times when she stayed here on March the eleventh, 1516, and again in 1527. Her second husband, Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, had a hunting-box near here at Friston, and they came here to hunt stag and wild boar—in our very old forest up the lane. We must walk there in a minute. Most of the trees probably remember those two!"

I asked him of the silver coffin which, say the local farm hands, is buried near by.

"Yes, they say there is one. There very well may be. Michael de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, was the only big man killed at Agincourt, you know, and he was brought home to be buried in Butley Priory Church—so he may have had a silver coffin. I think it very likely. So far we have six or seven stone ones lying about in the farmyard and against the old Priory barn walls, but the silver one is still safe underground, most likely enough with Michael in it. God rest him!

"My Wykehamists came and dug here a lot, you recollect. We found a heap of things, all sorts of things, and Myall made a list of birds which you would have liked. I've got it somewhere. He loved a day and a night by the fishponds and up in old Staverton Forest, with the herons and the hawks."

At Butley, as you see, the Middle Ages are very near. Medievalism comes in at the front door. The whispers of kings and abbots are its language.

From the tall forest trees which stand, a watching ring, beyond this clearing where the old house sits in full sun, the high bracken marches to the lawn's edge. Almost you expect to see a red stag feeding or surprise a forest boar, grey-muzzled, grunting among fallen acorns.

We walked into the trees, and they seemed to close about us like aisles of Ashtaroth. There is something sentient, oddly alive and watching, about such old forest trees. They have seen too much. From the gatehouse there runs to the south a stately and deserted avenue of great beeches and old Scots firs. They were planted in quincunxes by the first Lord Donegall in 1794. It is a royal avenue, challenging in its solitudes, grand in its conception amid these lonely heaths near the edge of the sea.

And to this noble avenue, thrusting their overcrowded, puny boles within a yard, shutting out both sun and air, comes one of those solid black phalanxes of cobwebbed firs which the Forestry Commission has thrown down all over East Anglia as a man might fling dirty dish-clouts on a marble floor. Like the bureaucrats who fathered them, they are prolific, mean, and multitudinous.

Whereas men in the past planted woods with an eye not only to sense but to beauty, this dull Commission is rapidly transforming East Anglia and parts of the New Forest into places as gloomy, as dark, as cobwebbed and musty, as regimented and forbidding as any Teutonic forest. Long aisles of grim black little trees, breeding-places of innumerable vermin—rats, stoats, magpies, jays, and the rest—a seat of perpetual fire risks and, in the end, a crop of fir-poles mean in size and often brittle in strength.

But people who can solemnly plant Scots and Corsican pines in the place of the immemorial oaks of Sherwood Forest, in place of the oaken walls of three centuries of Royal Navies, as they have done, and then owlishly assure the public that their 'experts'—that parrot word—consider them better suited, are capable of any folly.

These Government foresters could learn much, if they chose, from the visible works of the great landowners who, in the past, planned and planted the woods, belts, clumps, coverts, plantations, and copses which adorn our old parks, beautify our hills, crown the downs, hang like tapestries on mountainsides and give grace and good timber to the English scene. But all this is above the earthworm mind and office-bound vision of the average bureaucrat. The clerkish minions of the Forestry Commission have little to be proud of in East Anglia.[1]

Presently an unhumorous sentry halted us. He was the sort of man who would have made an ideal minor official.

[1] The Forestry Commission has now been swallowed up by the Ministry of Agriculture—a step worse.

"No admittance this way." Dr Rendall assured him that he had every right and every passport to pass that way.

"No one can pass," said the sentry. He was as near rude as his uniform would allow. "No admittance, I say," with the frigid conceit of a small man in brief authority.

"But I have a special pass. . . ."

"No pass will let you or anyone else through. It's barred."

"Then I think you had better see my pass."

We passed. And I do not think I have ever seen a more disappointed face than the face of the sentry. Tanks, lines of them, under the ancient beeches, were his charges—tanks which lay hidden under the shadows of history till they, in their turn, made history in Normandy.

At the end of the avenue we came to that fragment of a haunted forest which is near as old as measured history, a very part of England's time and bone. It is so old that the New Forest is no more than an upstart beside this wood of twisted trees and climbing mistletoe. It was here when the Druids raised their skinny arms to the sun, and blood ran on the altars of Stonehenge.

A keeper's cottage crouches at its edge, thatched and diamond-paned, in a little garden full of hollyhocks and brown and red autumn flowers. The forest comes up to it with wrinkled, reaching arms. You must be a man of no imagination to sleep well in that cottage.

In the forest there is silence. The feet sink into leaf-mould so deep that a stick goes in to the crook. The trees over-arch and soar. They are huge and gnarled—grotesque and eerily beautiful. A haunted place of strangely living trees, so old that man to them is a joke, a plaything of time. Oak and birch, beech and ivy, hoary mistletoe and gigantic holly—all are supernormal trees, beyond any I have seen in girth and age and sheer fantasy. It is a Hans Andersen wood, a place grimmer than Grimm, a place which you may picture as any fantastic theatre stage you please—a devil's abode, a monkish pleasance, a place of ghosts and woodland witchcraft, a hidden, lost echo of that old England of Giloas the Celt and Asserius the Saxon, which still hides here and there in forgotten pockets of the countryside. It is a place of the old gods, a place sacred before Christ walked on Galilee, a place so old that its memories are forgotten, its old gods blown whispers down the aisles of an older Britain that died when the Roman came.

"This is my walk, sometimes in the afternoon and sometimes in

the moon at midnight," said Dr Rendall. I made up my mind that should I ever walk there in the moon it would be with a gun and a crucifix, a Bible and a wary eye.

We came presently through that mysticism of old trees, treading so softly on the brown mould of a thousand years of trees that the jay forbore to chatter and the rabbit played unheeding, to a great, open arena. Perhaps twenty acres of flat, sandy soil, yellow and blazing gold on the far side with gorse and whins, on this overlooked by trees that, like enough, were here when Ethelred was on the Saxon throne and Wilburga was a queen ; an unearthly jousting-field between the forest and the heaths.

" That," he said, " is the Gods' Football Ground ! So I call it to myself. I love to imagine Hector and Ulysses and Alexander and Achilles in armour kicking a monstrous football with reverberating crashes and great gusts of laughter that shake the moss off these trees in showers. A pretty thought, isn't it ? "

And so, with minds full of that Olympian play, we walked back—back through a silver cascade of dead, white branches, down-bent like scrawny eldritch fingers—through waist-high bracken in which stood slim birches like silver girls, back into that old, listening wood of faces and figures and knotted arms, of ogres and elves and twisted giants and the witchhair of mistletoe.

" What a gallimaufry of medievalism. It smells of old Robin Hood ! Why, that old fellow, that oak, must be six hundred years old . . . and that, and those—and that dead thing, a thousand. . . . I must get a dry-point man down to sketch it all. A bookful of pictures ! Ah ! who could do it ? Muirhead Bone. But he's dead ! "

The keeper's cottage was drawing into the shadow of its thatch-bonnet for the night. Pheasants crowed and cock-upped to roost. Dogs jingled their chains in the kennels at the back. And, far back in the forest, the fantastic football-ground of the gods was alone with its dim echo of ghostly laughter, the clink of Parnassian armour.

Memory went back to another evening in that old forest of the tree-faces. A winter day's pigeon-shooting with Suffolk farmers. Pigeons bronze and oddly pink against the high glow of a red evening sun. Pigeons circling in, high as angels, or sitting, wary as monkeys, on the tops of tall, bare trees. Frosty hedges and rimy roads with a white snow-mist on the stubbles and a great cock pheasant, red-eyed and brilliant, strutting like a rajah.

I thought of that evening's pigeon-flight as we walked back under the great beech avenue, its pale, towering trunks soaring into the leafy vaults above the tanks.

" Some one who comes after me must replant this avenue," he said. " These beeches are too good to lose, and they won't last more than another forty or fifty years."

The Priory, his re-creation, rose out of the ground mist, greyly silver, like a great earthbound moth resting lightly on the grass where the King's deer had trod.

Long after the tanks have rusted and the bombers are a nightmare the thoughts and deeds of that scholarly lover of ancient beauty will endure.

III. SUDBOURNE HALL AND ITS SQUIRES

Down-at-heel Villages—The Coming of a Good Squire—How Sir Bernard Greenwell made the Desert Bloom—Soliloquy in a Kitchen Garden—A War-time Farming Achievement—The Treasure of Burrow Hill

> A beautiful sporting country. Large fields, small woods, dry soil; . . . there is a gentleman's large house. But the proprietor *lets it* and resides in a *farm house* and farms his own estate. Happy is the landlord who has the good sense to do this in time.
>
> WILLIAM COBBETT, *Rural Rides*

A SMACK BARELY MOVED ON A GLASSY SEA, WITH MAINSAIL, topsail, foresail, jib, flying jib, and mizzen all set, when I looked out of my window next dawn. It was to be a farming day. One of those pearl-grey mornings which mean real heat.

Presently Mr Oliver, who is agent to all this great 9500-acre estate of Sudbourne Hall, was down in the stable-yard and ready for work before I had breakfast eaten. Mr Oliver is one of those keen, hard-working young men who would worry themselves into their graves, their consciences sit so heavily upon them. It is perhaps as well that it should be so when the owner of the estate is a prisoner of war in Germany, as Sir Peter Greenwell was then.

His father, Sir Bernard, was the man who largely reassembled this once-famous agricultural estate and brought it back to something of its old glory after it had been sold and resold, huckstered about and broken on the wheel of speculation and high death duties, as have so many other properties which were once the pride of their owners, the fount of good farming precepts and land-banks to their tenants and village people. Now, having broken them by suicidal taxation, we seek to substitute extravagant War Agricultural Committees, who publish no accounts of the public moneys they spend, with their hordes of often overbearing officials against whose tyranny and power to cause eviction there is no right of appeal. A pretty negation of all English values.

"Come," said Mr Oliver. "First we'll look at the Hall. A nice shock you'll get, too."

We drove through the old town, which, when I first knew it, was part of the estate and the better cared for because of it, into the park and up to the house. On either side, the park, which I remembered

as five hundred acres of grass and bracken with a noble cricket-ground, was under cultivation. Seventy-two and a half acres of oats, fifty-three of sugar-beet, thirty-three of barley, thirty of carrots, and ten of currants, left nothing but a few rough belts of bracken and the tall woods beyond—a great testimony to Mr Oliver's practical farming, for it is poor, light land at the best. For that matter our ancestors were not fools and seldom laid out their best agricultural land as parkland unless it was for downright sound grazing and intended to be used as such.

The house, long and of red brick, with plain, tall windows and a great clock tower, is undistinguished but large. Once it was the home of that Marquis of Hertford whom Thackeray called " the wicked Lord Steyne " ; then of Sir Richard Wallace, his natural son, who left us the Wallace Collection and Hertford House to keep it in. After him came, at an interval, Kenneth Clark, that great Scots cotton magnate who was a good squire and a practical farmer. He was the father of the present Sir Kenneth Clark, until recently Director of the National Gallery. He made Sudbourne's fame ring round the world as a home of some of the finest Suffolk Punches, cattle, and sheep in England. Its stock went to South America, South Africa, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.

Then came an eminent soap-boiler who made a fortune from a product most lyrically named " Watson's Matchless Cleanser." He took to fox-hunting, which confirms the old saying that " new riches run to horse," but he did not last long at Sudbourne and the estate was soon in the melting-pot.

There is no need to follow the dreary twists of its downward fortunes. It was cut up, jobbed off, reduced to chaos and disruption, like a hundred others which have been broken by over-taxation and Government neglect of farming. The farms went down to grass and thistles. Thatch blew off the barns, and none was put back. Cottages lacked paint and mortar, and cottagers lacked work and money. Ditches choked and overflowed. Woods became rank and blind with undergrowth. Trees blew down, and there were none to saw them up. Hedges ran wild, and the villages of Sudbourne, Iken, and Butley were forlorn and down-at-heel. Their menfolk were mainly unemployed.

It was all a part and parcel of the English scene as we saw it in a score of counties, on a thousand once well-run estates, the result of shortsighted and largely class-conscious legislation. Lloyd George, that evil genius of rural England, began it all.

Then along came Sir Bernard Greenwell, a rich man with his heart in the land. Sudbourne needed money, and it needed this sort of squire. Gradually farms were bought back—first the Butley Abbey side of 2500 acres, in 1932, and then parts of Sudbourne and more later, but not all of the original farms. Finally, in 1938, the estate which had once been 11,200 acres was reassembled to 9500 acres. Then the wand of cash and brains began to work. The farms bloomed and the ditches were dug out. The barns were repaired and the byres rebuilt. The houses were reroofed and the roads resurfaced, the fences mended and the weeds deep-ploughed until they died. The labourers were in work and the women happy, the children well shod, and laughter rang again in the villages.

I looked, as we drove up to the hall, at a letter in my pocket from an old friend who had known the estate for years. . . .

> I have often thought of the annual Flower Shows which he [Sir Bernard] organized for all the employees. When he first came here the children who attended were underfed and poorly clad, and the women had a pinched, unhappy look. You couldn't help noticing it. That was because the estate had gone to rack and ruin and the Forestry Commission had bought so much outlying land, and big slices of Rendlesham as well. Their employment wasn't worth talking about. It simply threw men out of work. After that first Flower Show one soon noticed an improvement in the children's dress and health because the parents were in work again and had a good squire who took a personal interest. It must have been a great satisfaction to Sir Bernard to see the altered look of every one, especially the women and children.

Well, Sir Bernard is dead, and for that matter I never knew him, but I give that extract as a tribute to a great landowner and gentleman who did much for that corner of Suffolk. He had one principle on which he bought and did everything : " Value it, offer a price, never haggle." It cut right across the countryman's love of a wordy deal, but the results are apparent to-day at Sudbourne—excellent T.T. dairy herds; with Sudbourne Arch, a 2500-guinea Punch stallion, at the head of 86 horses; 550 head of cattle, 650 Suffolk ewes, and 25 sows and gilts. These totals were much larger before the war, when 2000 bacon pigs were fattened each year and 6000 poultry were run in addition.

Sir Bernard went on the sound and unbeatable principle that livestock are here to put humus into the soil. Grow something, put it in at one end of an animal, let something come out of the other end, put it on the soil, grow something again and put it back into

the animal, and there, plus a non-acid soil—is the very basis of all sound agriculture. It is, of course, far too simple a recipe for the mandarins of the Ministry of Agriculture who delight in talking wordily of " soil structure," " increased soil fertility," " intake and output," " balanced nutrition," and all the other mountebank jargon beloved of the pseudo-scientist and bureaucrats. Little minds invariably avoid plain English.

Shire horses and Southdown sheep were brought from Marden Park, the other Greenwell estate, in Surrey, but they did not do well on the light Sudbourne soil, and Suffolk Punches and Suffolk sheep had to be reintroduced—an ample answer to the cranks and ' rationalizers ' who cry for standardization of breeds. Essex pigs do well, and, crossed with a Large White, produce a good bacon type. Three fairly satisfactory dairy herds have been bred from Shorthorn stock, but owing to the war it was necessary to use Friesian and Ayrshire bulls, which has produced cross-breeds—a pity, but unavoidable.

Six thousand acres are farmed in three blocks of 2000 acres each, the remaining 3500 acres having been taken as a battle school. About 156 men and women are employed—less than pre-war—and a good deal of heavy machinery. It is interesting to find that the caterpillar diesel tractor which the late Lord Eltisley described to me as " heaven's gift to the heavy land farmer " is here used on all but the very sandy lands, and does excellent work on the marshes where Caterpillar D.4's are in use. The fleet of tractors is reinforced by sixty working horses and all the ploughs, harrows, rolls, and the rest that a man could desire.

Since the requisitioning of 3500 acres for a battle school the estate has had more machinery than it could usefully employ, and has been able to help its neighbours by doing extensive contract work, ploughing, sowing, harrowing, and harvesting. It is far better in a rural community that such neighbourly acts should be done by neighbours, known and liked, rather than by the self-sufficient little officials of War Agricultural Committees with their inevitable delays and prior attentions to the farms of Committee men and their friends. In this case the estate pool of machinery is due to the fact that Sir Bernard, like every other conscientious landowner, always tried to make the estate self-supporting and independent of outside help.

Arthur Young wrote that the Sudbourne soil was particularly suitable for carrots. What he said more than a hundred years ago

is equally true to-day. Many acres of carrots are grown—firm, clear-skinned, free from wrinkles and secondary growth, and absolutely without any fibre in the core. Wire-worm, so far, is absent, and so is the carrot fly, with the result that the estate has done well in marketing its carrots. The carrots, be it noted, are grown as part of the root-break on the poorer soils so that the better soils can be reserved for sugar-beet. An average of ten tons of sugar-beet on about three hundred acres can be looked for each year.

Mr Oliver has done a good deal with vegetables, and there is no doubt that much more could be done if the estate was only nearer larger centres of population. Blackcurrants average two tons an acre, and reach up to three tons, but they are so far no more than a novelty. Lord Fisher's remarkable success with them on the sandy soils at Kilverstone, in Norfolk—very similar to Sudbourne—is a first-class example of what can be done with the gilt-edged crop.

" Come and see the kitchen gardens. We've made them pay their way, and handsomely too."

One look at the front and back of the Hall was enough to persuade me to leave it. Gardens overgrown, lawns rank and rabbity, the lake stinking and noisome, its reeds stained black with oil sprayed from mosquito guns, rockeries a wilderness of weeds, gravel paths overgrown and trees out of hand—such is the price which Sudbourne, like many another great country house, has paid as the price of military occupation. Inside, ceilings were down, walls battered and defaced, panelling chipped, staircases cut and dented. It is a martyrdom against which I have heard no country-house owner complain, but I often wonder if the Army authorities could not exercise more care and supervision. The officers are to blame. A very little warning and supervision is all that is necessary. Damage is done to country houses which would never be done to barracks, apparently on the principle that " Oh ! it will be paid for." But money alone cannot replace historic work or " knit up the ravell'd sleave of care."

There are stables at Sudbourne fit for a Master of Hounds' establishment, a stable-yard that would hold a duke's carriages, and a game larder whose magnitude is sufficient index to the sporting capabilities of this magnificent shoot.

But we went to the walled kitchen gardens, placid in the sun, the greenhouses seductive with peaches and nectarines, glowing with tomatoes.

All the garnered friendliness of the ages seems to gather in an old

walled garden. It is a place of peace and philosophy, where the hours tread slow, but time is not wasted nor labour ill-spent. The pear-trees on the old red walls, the bees in the beans, the pigeon cooing in the top of the fir-tree overshadowing the far wall, finches among the medlar branches, and the toad who sits, golden-eyed and Buddhaesque, enshrined in lettuces, knowing well that he is a man of note and sanctity—these are the familiars of the kitchen gardens, their shrine the old grey-lichened, red-brick walls which hold the sun and the bees, their walks the tall, grey-green rows of onions and the fanciful filigrees of ranked carrots, the dark coverts of currant-bushes, or dim, green aisles of raspberries and the feathery forest of the asparagus-beds. There are figs on the walls, plums red as blood, and apples like dairymaids among the branches, peaches to blush in the soft English sun, and damsons dark-blue.

These walls have seen the peaceful pageant of every sort of man and woman at ease and in good mind, from the Elizabethan busy with herbs for possets to the neat Georgian, concerned with shallots and such new things and the practical, red-cheeked Victorian wife with her quick wits for stillroom and cellar. Who ever heard of a murder in a kitchen garden? What novelist ever planted a steaming romance among the cabbages? No, kitchen gardens are for the pleasant, peaceful ways of life, not for the hot, nor the cold. They are ministers to the stomach and the nose, the eye and the palate—and the heart and head are stilled and made more philosophic thereby. They are the homely background and backbone of all English history. Long after the Frenchified *parterres* which aped Versailles are weed-grown, long after the stone pergolas which mimicked a stucco Italy are fallen, in days when lawns are wildernesses and gravel drives are rabbits' runways, the kitchen garden survives, man's minister and woman's temple of peace.

I thought for a nostalgic moment of all the old kitchen gardens, walled and exquisite with fruit smells and little birds, where I have walked and dallied on bright mornings—Brampton, where Montagu lived and Pepys walked and discoursed; Itton, under the Monmouth hills, with its music of hounds from the kennels; Crabbet, and its memories of that scholar-poet-rebel-squire, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, and his even more erudite daughter, Lady Wentworth, with her Arab horse lore, unmatched in the world; Madingley, with the rooks robbing the trees; Merton, where de Greys have dwelt for six hundred years and carp stir among the water-lilies; Hillington, beside its little shining river; Gruinard,

with the salmon splashing in the pools below and the buzzards mewing above; Farleigh Wallop, where we mixed politics with potatoes; and a dozen others of the very heart and bone of England.

"That half an acre of onions is worth eighty pounds," said Mr Oliver, "and we are getting one-and-nine to half a crown each for nectarines and half a crown to four bob for peaches. We've sent off four thousand this summer.

"They're twelve-and-six each in London," said I, with memories of Mayfair robbers. "How many do you employ and how big are these gardens—four acres?"

"No. Three and a half acres in the walls. Two men and four women do the lot! We use a horse or two and rubber-tyred carts, and we manage. That's the head gardener's bothy—rent-free, of course." He pointed to a red-brick cottage as good as any for which a man would pay a hundred a year in the suburbs of London.

Then we walked round the park and down to the marshy meadows, where straight dykes were full of golden-brown water and moorhens hid in the sedges and grey-green willows and silver poplars marched in straight lines, and cattle moved, fly-flicking.

The Lodge Field in the park, which I remembered before the war as rough grass, had been broken up and had grown fourteen sacks of oats to the acre, and on the Dry Field and Pavilion Field—where once M. D. Lyon and his mighty brother played heroic cricket—they had grown fifteen sacks an acre on one and ten sacks to the acre on the other, and were expecting eleven tons of washed beet to the acre off another erstwhile paradise of rabbits.

After that it was time for lunch—bread-and-cheese and tomatoes, with a whacking great Spanish onion and a quart of Mr Adnams's Suffolk ale—and then on, by Richmond Farm and Gedgrave Hall, those two yeomen's houses which overlook the marshes and the sea, till we came to the sandy bit of heath beyond Gedgrave Hall. A man may stand there under the thin, windy firs, and gaze out over the Alde, which here calls itself the Ore, to the North Sea, and inland over the Butley river, that twisting snake of salt water, to Burrow Hill, crowned with barley, and the far woods which hide old Butley Priory and its stone barns and coffins till they melt into the hazy distance above Staverton Forest, where Edmund the Martyr walks most surely, and his eye will not wander far off this great English property. It is a good sight, as fair a view as any in Suffolk, that most English of counties.

Down below, black-and-white Angus-Galloway cattle moved against the green marsh below that wood by the salt water which calls itself, for some reason since forgotten, the Rods. Fifteen Suffolk Punches made far golden dots on the emerald of the marshes over the Butley river—that river where the spoonbills had fished and stalked a year before—and, beyond, four tall poplars in Butley Abbey garden rose, slender spires against the sky. Chillesford Lodge and stables showed red through trees to the right. They have a polo-ground there, an odd incongruity in this land of heath and partridge stubbles, of cattle marsh and tidal flats.

" Those marshes down there were let at two pounds an acre before the war," said Mr Oliver, pointing his stick. " Now we've been bid up to eight an acre for 'em. It's all to do with this craze for black-and-white cattle which has swept East Anglia. Some farmers seem to have gone mad about them.

" Once milk is bought and sold on its solids contents—*i.e.*, butter fat and solids not fat, instead of water—the black and whites will have a serious setback," he said, " excepting the ones which have comparable butter fat and solids, not fat, to the other breeds and, as a consequence, usually a similar bulk yield! I think we are the only country of any consequence that just talks in ' gallons of milk.' We should talk in pounds of butter fat per cow per lactation. Possibly, at a later date, even the medical profession may realize that it is as equally important to classify milk as say, port or bread, not only on its percentage content but on type of the butter fat too. Apart from the percentage of butter fat in milk it is generally agreed that in most cases the small fat globule of the Friesian breed is more digestible than the large fat globule of the other Channel Island breeds. This argument, I think, supports the black and white case for human consumption, but does not strengthen the case when the bulk of our milk will surely go to manufacture."

We walked down the stubble towards the shining flats, where gulls were mewing and curlew bubbling. A hare went away at a great pace for the Rods, and I took a shot at him, missed, and he crossed a plank over the dyke into the wood like an express train. When I got to it I found it was only three and a half inches wide. A mallard rose out of a dyke and out of range, and a cloud of pigeons clattered out of the trees in the wood.

Within was a scene of confusion and destruction. Trees had been felled, but the fellers had created twice as much destruction as was necessary. Saplings smashed and twisted; lop and top left

anywhere and anyhow, young trees splintered and left, old trees riven by the fall of carelessly felled boles, a rutted logging-road looking as though a squadron of tanks had been through, fences broken and left gaping.

"Tanks?" said I.

"No. Ministry of Supply. That's the way the Government 'experts' leave a wood when they've got all they want out of it. Nice, isn't it? Pretty forestry!" It is the same wherever the minions of that mushroom Ministry fell timber.

We crossed the Butley river in a punt and climbed Burrow Hill. Somewhere in it, they say, lies a ship and a Danish sea-king with his weapons and gold about him. It may be. They are buried all up this whispering coast, which has seen the shipmen of all nations.

"Queen Elizabeth had most of the barrows dug up and took their treasures," Mr Oliver remarked. "But she missed Sutton Hoo, and she may very well have missed something here. I often think that this deep pit on the summit is the remains of an excavation by Lord Hertford or one of the Lords Rendlesham, maybe.

"You know the local story, of course, of the two labourers who dug up something—they would never say what—in a field by Gedgrave Hall. They kept mighty quiet about it, but neither of 'em ever did another day's work for anyone but 'emselves, and they both bought very nice little houses and lived comfortably—out of *something*. Probably a hoard of gold coins. Although the local story is that it was a gold vase they found."

There are legends of hidden gold and buried treasure all up this long and lonely coast, heritage of Danish burials and smugglers' hidings. Sometimes something is found. Much more remains lost.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in looking round stackyards and stockyards, milking-sheds and sheep-pens, fields of pale oats and acres of shining beet. At Sudbourne they go on the usual cropping rotation. Malting barley is the real quality crop in this land with its long barley tradition, and it is usually grown after sugar-beet, when, provided no nitrogenous fertilizer is used, top prices are the result. Rye has done well as a war-time crop—very well indeed—and four hundred acres was down to it for the 1944 programme. It gives a greater weight of corn per acre than wheat, which is in any case unsuitable for most of this light Suffolk soil. Barley, sugar-beet, carrots, and sheep-feed, with enough oats for home consumption, make up the rest.

Mr Oliver's cropping figures for 1943 and 1944 may interest other

light land farmers, so here they are. Remember that of the acres farmed, only 3400 acres are arable, with 2340 acres of grazing, mainly marshes, and 970 acres of woodland, the rest being buildings, houses, roads, and dykes.

CROPPING SUMMARIES: 1943 AND 1944

Crop	1943	1944
Wheat	196	218
Rye	217	371
Beans	49	19
Peas	54½	61
Small seeds	273	350½
Oats	452	168
Barley	347	434
Sugar-beet	260	278
Mangolds	51	34
Kale	22	16
Carrots	98	85
Sheep-feed	170	243
Lupins	98½	39
Maize	3	—
Cow cabbage	1	—
Various	38½	14
Fallow	16	—
Per grass	—	23
Potatoes	7	—
	2353½	2353½

Every acre of arable land has had a dressing of chalk. In all, since Sir Bernard started the scheme, some 30,000 tons have been put down, the idea being to maintain a *p*H-value of 5. Lump chalk from the local pits near Ipswich is used, and is still used as more parcels of rough land are brought under the plough. About 450 acres have been recovered from bracken and rough grass.

Looking at one farm, neat, well roofed, its stockyard concreted, its milking-sheds spotless, yet its outward appearance unmarred by hideous galvanized iron or that glaring and equally hideous pre-cast concrete which is now the rage among those farmers who always follow each new, so-called 'scientific' fad like sheep, Mr Oliver remarked :

"This was a real, mucky old Suffolk off-farm when Sir Bernard bought it—roofs half off, yard a couple of feet deep in stinking muck, wells poisoned by it, farmhouse filthy, and the whole place fit to be condemned. Now look at it! That's what Sir Bernard meant when he said once that other people might spend fifty thousand pounds a year on yachting or horse-racing, or give spectacular sums to hospitals, but he was going to take a derelict agricultural estate, a real 'depressed area,' and put life and heart into it. He did!"

We walked back in the late afternoon over Burrow Hill, whence we saw three minesweepers still at it, sweeping the swatchways up to Lowestoft. They had been there ten hours before in the light of the morning—unconsidered, heroic hand-maidens of the sea. We went across acres of firm marshes, which Sir Bernard reclaimed from snipe bogginess to good grazing. Miles of dykes have been 'fyed out' in six months by two mechanical diggers at a cost of about five pounds an acre. Never in living memory have the marshes or the dykes been so clean.

I shot a pair of rabbits, a whacking great hare, and a curlew as we crossed the Butley river. On these tours my gun goes with me and fills the pot. Anyone who says that a roast young curlew, fresh off the stubbles, is not very good eating does not know what he is talking about.

By the time we had got to Gedgrave Hall the bats were out, a mist was on the marshes, and the sea was a dim loneliness where a great beam of light, full ten miles long, moved like a gigantic spotlight, part of the bizarre pageantry of war. Owls were hissing in the barns that knew many a keg and barrel of smuggled liquor, and a stone curlew came over from Burrow Hill with that high and liquid whistle which took my heart in the Norfolk Brecks too many years ago.

"It seems too peaceful for war—and our poor young Sir Peter out there in the prison camp," said Mr Oliver quietly. "I send him long letters about all we're doing on the estate. How he would love this. . . ."

In that silence of sea and sleeping fields, with the far, faint cry of a lamb out on the immense bosom of the marsh, the whimper of ducks' wings overhead, the smell of kale and cattle in the sandy lane, one felt that happiness and good homes had come again to this great estate through the vision and practical good heart of one man—the dead squire. His memorial is in his land and in the hearts of his cottage people. His son has come home.

IV. SUFFOLK SOIL

A Partridge Day in "the Wicked Lord Steyne's" Park—On some Partridge-Shooters—When They come like Cannonballs—Duck on the Abbey Marsh—"Sweet Suffolk Owls"—Wings in the Twilight—A Great French Shikari—Goering's Abominable Shooting—The Pudsey Parliament

Give a man a horse he can ride,
Give a man a boat he can sail,
And his rank and wealth, his strength and health
On sea nor shore shall fail.

JAMES THOMSON, *Sunday up the River*

"COME AND SHOOT PARTRIDGES TO-MORROW," MR OLIVER HAD said the night before on Burrow Hill.

So there we were, at ten of the clock on a blue September morning, assembled in front of the long, low hall which, in spite of its plain brick and comparative youth—for it was only built in 1754, which makes it a mere youngster among Suffolk manor houses—contrives to look as though it had grown into its park and become part of it.

The keepers came out of the stable arch with a mixed and motley crowd of beaters. They ranged from very old men, so earthy that you might imagine sap ran in their veins instead of blood, to small and energetic children who buzzed with excitement like bees. From eight to eighty was a fair range of ages, for I found one ancient of seventy-nine and one infant of nine—both full of venatic fire.

Already—for it was only eight o'clock by 'God's time,' the dew still wet on the bracken, the mist smoking among the lakeside reeds—there was the promise of a hot day. That pale blue, faintly misty sky, barely flecked by a horsetail of white cloudlets, forewarned a boiling midday.

The whine and buzz of the sawmill in the estate woodyard was a metallic monotone in the still air.

We lined a sunny slope of bracken. Rye stubbles were pale tawny below. The beaters filed off beyond a far pine-belt. Guns laid out their cartridge bags, stuck their shooting-sticks in the earth, sat and lit pipes, and ruminated. It was that initial wait before the first drive, where every one takes a good look at his neighbour, a

longer look at the ground, and weighs up the chances of " Where will they come ? "

It is always a fascinating study to watch one's fellow guests at a shoot and try to sum up their fads and performances. The brick-red old gentleman with the white moustache, the very worn green keeper-like suit, and the old retriever is, you may be quite sure, a highly efficient, not-to-be-fussed sort of shot. Nothing of a gallery performer, but you may be sure that few birds within range will get by him. Most of them will be hit in the head, no long shots will be taken, and there will certainly be no steeplechasing by the retriever with all its attendant yells and whistles.

The long, lean army man with the newish gun and the shooting spats will almost certainly be indifferent. Army men, for some unfathomable reason, seldom shoot well. But that Post Captain of the Royal Navy has a useful look about him and has, you may be sure, learned enough in Chinese paddy-fields, Indian jheels, and African berseem to show us all where the charge should be placed.

Then there is, perhaps, a solid, jolly, likeable sort of a farmer or two, who, you may safely bet, would really be happier walking them up than driving. He is a spaniel-and-plod type of shot—not your ' brace in front and one behind ' performer. Few farmers shoot driven birds really well, and if you want to see a lot of cartridges fired, much cheerful noise, and relatively few birds gathered, go to a farmers' shoot.

But that country doctor, who knows everybody's troubles for twenty miles round, and that lean, reddish lawyer who has helped to sell and resell half the land in the county—they are a couple of dark dogs. You may see a really artistic performance from the doctor, who is also probably as fine a practitioner at snipe as he is on his rounds, and the lawyer will probably be a model of quiet efficiency.

As for the rather self-important gentleman with the last war temporary rank of Major to which he clings sedulously, the pair of guns and showy-looking golden retriever dancing on a lead and the harassed boy-loader—well, there we shall see rapid and undistributed fire at all angles, much running in by the ' ginger biscuit ' dog until the heat reduces its summer fat to ultimate somnolence, much cursing of the child loader, and few dead birds. But many excuses—" The sun was dead in my eye." " You know, going downwind and *curling*. Impossible ! " " That damned dog needs fining down, too highly bred, you know." " Cleared everything at the

Field Trials though, just needs work." "My boy was slow in passing." The breed never dies.

But none of these familiar shooting companions was present that hot, blue day in Sudbourne Park—merely a hand-picked little few of old friends, who knew each other and were out for a quiet day in the sea-wind on one of the loveliest partridge manors in all East Anglia. So there was time to look about and observe the unforgettable things of the Suffolk morn—twites energetic about a rye-stack, a goldfinch swinging on a thistle, a kestrel high as a king in the sea-blue sky, and aisle on aisle of hot, resinous pines, still in the heat. Swifts hawked in splendid arcs above the chestnut avenue where there should, of course, have been the distant swing and jingle of an Edwardian barouche with a pair of matched bays stepping high. The hot air shimmered against the green-blue tapestry of firs, while crickets discoursed and a wren went intently about secret business in the bracken forest. All was still and baking and silent.

Then a white shirt glimmered among the pines a third of a mile away across the sea of bracken. Another showed, and another. Suffolk voices came shrill and boyish on the air. "Hare we goo, bor! Hare we goo!" Shrill squeals from infants, neolithic gutturals from ancients. They plunged into the tall bracken, boys hidden, men wading waist-deep. Anything might come out of that red-and-brown jungle, anything from a great hare in a hurry to a covey of skulking Frenchmen, a fleeing rabbit, or a bouquet of pheasants, and come they did—four, five, six—yes, eight. Straight as cricket balls they came, hurtling a yard above the bracken.

Then they saw the guns and turned like snipe—turned so suddenly that two instant barrels barked as one. One bird flung back its head, dissolved into a puff of floating feathers, and crashed headlong into the bracken.

The rest swung round the corner like sparrow hawks—round a huge Scots pine and over the Port Reeve. A bare moment against the high blue, a fraction of time as butt touched shoulder, eye telegraphed to trigger finger, report stabbed on report, and two fell—right, left—that high moment of instant nerve and action of hands and eye and brain when the seconds fuse and man is electrical.

And then others were up and coming—ones, twos, and threes, out of the bracken—and the firing swelled to a staccato tattoo all along the line. Partridges hit the sand in the carrot field and flung up tiny puffs of dry dust. Partridges sky-rocketed and screwballed

overhead and fled to safety. Partridges crashed into the bracken like shells, and a cock bird thudded into the top of a great pine and ricochetted down from branch to branch till he hit the pine-needles with a feathery thud. A sparrow hawk came over like a flash of light, and four barrels saluted his mockery. Empty cases flicked from the breech and tinkled into the bracken, and then that first glorious covey which came divinely was over.

Five and a half brace down, and there must have been twenty birds scattered in that bracken. Would that they might rise always in such obliging succession !

The next stand was on the brow of the carrot field with a pit-hole in front, hidden by gorse and old, rooty heather over which they swung in most delectable and obliging fashion, giving shots which a de Grey or a Frank Barker might have taken worthily.

Memories of such days always stand out for odd, small reasons—the sudden visions of unconsidered trifles which make a lasting mind-picture and are there to remain long winters after.

First, the waist-high advance through fifty acres of tall bracken, where partridges rose in ones and twos, until we came to that half-hidden sandpit in the middle where sudden birds erupted on all sides like springing bombs and the fire was hot and crosswise and it was ten to one that your neighbour would drop one on your hat, or the dog would flush an odd and startled youngster between your legs.

The rough-and-tumble hunt for the scattered remnants of a covey in what had once been the Italian Garden. An old cock limned against the sky over the terrace wall, the horseshoe on his breast startlingly distinct.

The pair of duck which rose beyond the deserted boathouse, and the thump of the mallard who fell to the first barrel on the iron bridge. Pigeons clattering out of tall elms by thatched barns. A hare going great guns across the green horse-marshes beyond the park belt. The swirl of a shoal of bream and tench in one of the big dykes when a teal fell in the cross drain and was retrieved, its pencilled feathers glittering with water, spangled with tiny green weed.

Lunch in an old saddle-room, faded rosettes of past winners still pinned on the walls, iron saddle-racks rusty from disuse, the smell of leather faintly persistent. Stamp and snort of cart-horses, patient-eyed, in stables which had known noble carriage-horses and hackneys with the feet of music.

Then the long afternoon, shooting our way down on to a green

marsh at the back of Butley Abbey, that ancient farmhouse compounded of all sorts and shapes of monastic stones, where, in peace, Sir Peter Greenwell lives. They have two mighty barns there, one with walls two or three feet thick, which the old men say was once the prison of the priory. The other is a noble building with rounded doors and huge buttresses and all the air of having held a full winter's store of food enough to feed a lord's feudal army or a prior's multitude of priests and hangers-on. An out-of-the-world house with its monastic barns and cobwebby lofts of great grey stones and iron-hard beams, its stockyards full of munching cattle and, in the roadway, stone coffins standing on end against the barn wall, just as they were dug up.

"I reckon there's six more lay under this here roadway, master," said the foreman. "But the guv'nor hain't had time to dig 'em up. We're a'usin' o' the roadway too much. Hap we do dig we'll find that silver coffin what lay here."

Always the legend of the silver coffin recurs. It is rooted and unmovable as one of those great oaks in the mystical forest beyond the grey Priory gatehouse. Is it the coffin of a vanished prior, or, more likely, that of Michael de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, who was killed at Agincourt in that "three long hours" of battle on Friday, the twenty-fifth of October, 1415, when a Norfolk knight, old Sir Thomas Erpingham, led the van of Henry the Fifth's puny little army of fifteen thousand men against the French ninety thousand, "at the bloody blast of the terrible trumpet," and thrashed them? De la Pole was the only great English noble to fall on that day, when half the chivalry of France, including the Duke of Alanson (as Raphael Holinshed calls d'Alençon), were slaughtered. He is said to have been brought down to Suffolk "when tidings of this great victory was blown into England" and buried in the Priory Church of Butley. So we may play with the thought that the silver coffin holds that mighty dust.

Down the road of the coffins lies a green marsh, snug between two woods, cut by broad dykes, a place of peewits and cattle, with a shallow overflow here and there which never seems to dry. There, on a dykeside, with a gleaming shallow at my back, I stood and waited for that evening duck which is always the fatal lure when more material men have gone home to tea and toast and the glint of the fire. The sun went down, and the west was a tender glow of pale golds and thin red and apple-green. The mists rose shyly, and cattle-breath frosted on the air. Moorhens ker-erked

and pattered busily, as though all the great business of the day was upon them. And the pheasants cock-upped to roost in the deep wood behind and the shaggy oak wood in front, while " the sweet Suffolk owls " haunted the dusk.

A little owl mewed like a cat to three other little owls in different corners of the marsh. A barn owl came " Skree-ee " like a knife-point of sound on faint wings, a huge sulphur-and-cream body silent on the air, and wood owls answered with their monotonous grind-stone note. Eleven owls were calling at one time. A shelduck sat somewhere out in the mist and laughed like a drowned satiric ghost. Peewits wept and swept madly by, tumbling on the wing like leaves in a gale, and a curlew added his sea-whistle over the brow of Oakwood.

As for the moorhens, it was quite plainly a case of a raffish father and his hooligan children out on the spree in a ditch long after closing-time while a shrewish mother squealed from a thick hedge that supper was ready and that she had worked herself to the claws to get it.

Every bird of wood and marsh bewitched that hour betwixt the going down of the sun and the coming of black night and white starlight—every bird but a duck.

So presently, cold in body but enchanted in mind, I went home. Later we gathered in the Jolly Sailor—the Brinkleys, a coastguard, a marsh shepherd, two squadron leaders, and a man from Wickham Market who had come to buy cattle. The wireless was on, the Brains Trust in full, self-conscious blare.

" Turn them owd wimmen off. Dizzy fools ! " said the man from Wickham Market. " They fair make me sick."

" Ah! " said the coastguard. " A turn at sea would drill some sense into that lot. I'd maroon 'em an' see if they could navigate themselves home! If they didn't they could talk theirselves to death."

" Trouble is they don't know nawthen what signify," added the shepherd. " I could git more sense out o' me owd dog. He do do his job and *know* his business."

" Why we tolerate an ex-pacifist yapping at us in war-time is past my understanding," said Squadron Leader No. 1. " Twenty pounds a week for that balderdash, and a Spitfire pilot gets less than a fiver for doing a real job."

" Ah, well, it keeps little girls' brains off more important things," said Squadron Leader No. 2. " They're the gremlins of the mind! "

On which note that deadly dull parliament of pompous priggish-

ness and platitudes was dismissed. I have often wondered if the B.B.C. quite realize the ridicule which this smug feature provokes, particularly among hard-headed country people. It is a tragic commentary on our lack of real education and the stultifying standardization of everyday thought that such pontifical nonsense should survive for a day—and be paid for.

I dined that night with a shooting friend, Lieutenant-Colonel Count Claude de BoisLambert. Now, the gallant and inextinguishable colonel is a remarkable fellow. Small and robin-like, he is deceptively quiet and disarming. An impeccable chef, an esoteric judge of wine, a connoisseur of old firearms, an amateur of ornithology, a fierce motorist, a dead shot, and a tireless walker. He is also quite without fear. All these, you will agree, are most admirable qualities.

But put a gun in his hand and show him a wild duck, or, indeed, any feathered thing, and the whole demeanour of the man changes. A lambent flame lights his eye. His muscles tauten. His skin contracts. He concentrates. He crouches, creeps, stalks, runs, leaps dykes, storms sea-walls—and shoots. He shoots to kill. And I may say that very little ever gets away.

Indeed, I believe that if a tomtit were to make a noise like a cock pheasant it would be positively its last utterance on earth.

This gallant shikari has shot elephant—many elephants—in fourteen years of African big-game hunting. He has swept lions by the dozen into the lionly Valhalla and banished buffalo to an *Ewigkeit* where white men cease from troubling. He has shot wild boar and wolves in Poland on those vast feudal estates of Potockis and Radzivills where now the Red Russian chants his sardonic belief in liberty, freedom, and equality to slightly bewildered Poles, who remember Warsaw and the help which never came.

Once upon a time he shot with Goering at the Schorfheide, but unfortunately he did not shoot *at* Goering. He tells me that Goering was a very indifferent shot indeed.

When this war began Claude was in Africa. So he very shortly captured a Vichy post for the de Gaulle cause and with it some four or five warships, assisted in this somewhat major operation only by a mere handful of black soldiers. For this Vichy captured him, put him in a dark cell, and sentenced him to death. He escaped and was in at the beginning of the death when we landed on his own marshes at Isigny, in Normandy. So, you see, he is like the robin whom he resembles, a fighter to the death.

Now, he told me three interesting things : the first about Goering, the second about wildfowl under the Germans, and the third that wild greylag geese were nesting during the latter years of the war in the marshes of the Somme about Abbeville and elsewhere in places where they had not been known to nest for a hundred years.

This, and the fact that his own marshes between Isigny—from which bleak coastal village, by the way, the English family of Disney (D'Isigny) derive their Norman name—and Carentan were packed with thousands of wildfowl up to the day of our invasion and again within a fortnight of the tide of battle having swept over them and on to Caen, was due to the fact that the Germans had rigorously prohibited all forms of shooting—other than that of defenceless civilians—except by the highest officers, who, in any case, went out heavily escorted when they essayed to shoot something flying and not blindfolded against a wall.

The result was that French fields and woods which, in the piping days of peace, were ruthlessly decimated by sporting Gauls in hot pursuit of anything on two or four legs from village maids to wild boars and singing larks, became once again thick with game, rabbits, hares, wild pig, and roe deer, while the marshes were clamorous with geese, widgeon, mallard, snipe, waders, and plover. No doubt this happened also in Denmark, Holland, Norway, and much of Germany—a fact which might account for the relatively poor wartime wildfowl seasons in Britain, except when really hard weather forced the birds to our shores.

Goering, said Claude, was a really indifferent shot, but intensely interested in game preservation and the art and history of Continental venery. His huge hunting-lodge at Karinhalle, on the Schorfheide, a wild heath some miles from Berlin, was a pseudo-baronial castle built round a little wooden thatched hut set most incongruously in the centre of the vast Gothic hall of Karinhalle itself—a hut within a castle.

This, Goering, with the oafish sentimentality peculiar to Germans, preserved as a memorial to his first wife, Karin. It was unlocked in great solemnity with a gold key. Within, the temple to past connubial heavens turned out to be a wine-bar where the Head Gamekeeper of Germany produced the best Oloroso and Old East India. Goering, so far as the impossible is possible with a German, had some semblance of the habits, if not the instincts, of a gentleman. Hitler, on the other hand, always reminded one in his deadly earnestness and malevolent intensity to ' better ' mankind, whether

mankind desired it or not, of a militant member of the London School of Economics. However, as the late Lord Riddell once remarked to me of a man whom we both disliked and who was just dead : " The worms have the best of the argument now."

At a Polish shoot, at, I believe, a Potocki palace, BoisLambert saw five lynxes driven up to Goering's hide. He missed the first four and wounded the fifth ! His performances at elk and boar were no better, and he was, I believe, a ' poking ' shot at driven birds. One wonders how he would have performed on snipe!

Next day I went back to Essex, where for two war years we dwelt in a white wooden house on the edge of that great deer-park of Thorndon Hall, where, alas, are no more tall and glancing deer, but merely golfers unlovely of raiment.

And there, next morning, in that sweet and most kindly village of Herongate, I was woken by the stentorian roar of an old friend who hitched his horse to the garden gate and shouted, " Come on, tumble out there! You're coming to Pudsey with me to wake your ideas up! " So to Pudsey we went.

Now, the Saxons called it Puteseia. It was a lonely wooden hall set on a bare ridge of cold upland with its face to the south and its back to the wildfowl-haunted tidal flats of the river Crouch.

The Normans changed its name to Podehele or Pudshall, and gave the manor to the De Veres. Before that, when the Danes sailed up the Crouch and Canute fought that great battle at Assandune which licked Edmund Ironside and decided the fate of England in 1016, it was still a manor. You may be sure that Canute, when, as the story goes, he was building that little church at Ashingdon—which sits, to-day, on a green hill, cattle-dotted, modest in a belt of elms taller than itself—rode his great war-horse over these wide fields about the salt tide to his new castle at Canutes Don. Nowadays they simply call it Canewdon, a tiny, forgotten Essex village of barge-boarded cottages with warm red roofs.

Somewhere after Canute's time, when Danish rule had relaxed its warrior grip on England, all sorts of sea-reivers came up the Crouch, their stealing longships scaring the wild geese in thousands, their brigand crews setting hall and thorpe alight in the wild flames of midnight raid and killing. So they dug a moat on the river side of Podeshithe and continued it on the west and east, leaving the south, or landward, side guarded by a strong stockade of sharp-pointed oaken staves, driven in the earth so that their points stuck outwards.

All through the echoing ages Puteseia, the lonely Saxon farm, stuck to the land and the ways of the land. Its name was bandied about, misspelt, and respelt by successive generations until it became Pudsey Hall, an earthy, puddingy, clodhopping sort of name well suited to a strong, dour little farming-hall set on strong, cold land in the teeth of the sea-wind.

Perhaps that explains the independent spirit of the Pudsey people to-day. Every one of them, from the six-foot guv'nor, that grand hard-riding yeoman, Will Goodchild who pulled me from my bed that morning, and lives in East Horndon Hall—one of Anne of Cleves' manors—to fifteen-year-old Kathleen Revell, has strong views on life and on farming in particular.

You would expect it of Will, for his forbears were farming in Essex and Suffolk five hundred years ago, and over a door in his Elizabethan manor house he has the motto :

> The man who would be free
> Must learn to work without a master

with the home-made rider, " Amble, Don't Trot." Kathleen's great-grandfather worked for Will's great-grandfather about a hundred and fifty years ago at Hundon in Suffolk. They take that sort of thing quite for granted.

They farm about seven hundred acres at Pudsey, from flat cattle-marshes piebald with black-and-white Friesians to bold upland fields, ash-blonde with pale barley, golden with tall wheat, and tawny with ripe mustard. There are bold-stepping Suffolk horses with chestnut coats that hold the sun, and huge black Essex pigs with white waistcoats, in the grass fields under the mighty oaks and elms where the herons and rooks nest. It was there that one of the last pairs of ravens in Southern England nested in 1861.

They work hard at Pudsey, " all the hours that God sends," and they think hard and talk straight. So it was that at " dockey time," when men sit down to bread-and-cheese and onions and beer, we fell " a-parliamentin'." It happens most days, sitting under a stack, or on the sea-wall, or in the kitchen at Pudsey Hall.

We began with labour, for Will owned and farmed 2250 acres until shortage of labour forced him to give it up. That was after he had reclaimed 480 acres of rough marsh, and, on that and on 120 acres of five-year-old grass, plus 100 acres of arable—making 700 acres in all—grew £14,000 worth of food on it in a year, which is possibly a record for Essex (see my *Farming Adventure*).

"The War Agricultural Committees corner all the labour for their farming and then publish no profit-and-loss accounts," said I. "No wonder you can't get labour."

"Ah!" said Jack Revell, with the deliberation of a foreman who has seen labour troubles in all their diversities for forty years, "I was born on Huntingfield Hall Farm, old Lord Huntingfield's estate at Heveningham in Suffolk—a fine old gentleman too, an' a rare good landlord. We were taught respect. Touch your hat to the squire an' the parson an' call the farmer 'master'! Didn't do me any harm. I believe in boys bein' taught to respect others. Then they learn self-respect theirselves. When they've got that they work hard, save their brass, an' end up as *men*—with a good wife an' home into the bargain. If they have no self-respect they've no sense of duty, an' I'm havin' no man on the pay-roll without a sense of duty.

"But half these youngsters nowadays want to dodge real work, smoke fags, hang round a gal, an' swing on the cinema door-handle. They'll get a shake-up when the Army boys come home lookin' for jobs! You can't leave a sick cow or a wild young horse with chaps like that. Bad men make bad animals! An' a man's no good with animals if he can't handle 'em by himself, without allus havin' the Master's eye on him."

"How about conscientious objectors?" I asked.

"We had some on Wallasea Island," said Will, "an' they *were* conscientious. Worked well, didn't they, Jack?"

"Ah," said Jack.

"Italian prisoners any good?"

"No. Allus grinnin' and laughin' an' gettin' saucy with half a chance—and then crawl to you if you cut up rough. No use for 'em."

Jack drew slowly at his pipe. His mind had flown back forty years to a Victorian boyhood on the broad wheat-fields of Huntingfield Hall Farm.

"Beer was three-ha'pence a pint then," said he, with sudden irrelevance. "We brewed twenty gallons of harvest beer at home for six-and-threepence worth of hops, or eighteen gallons of strong beer for the same money.

"A man'd go to the pub with a bob, have a good evening, drink all he wanted, have a few trials of strength with the lads—boys were stronger in the arm and body then—an' go home feelin' all the better for it. He'd change in his pocket, too!

"We earned thirteen shillin's a week then, an' money went a long way. We lived on bullock's hearts, sheeps' heads, an' sheeps' liver with, chance times, a bit o' beef; pig in our own sty an' our own rabbits, hens, an' bees. Allus had a hive o' bees an' plenty of free milk an' honey an' eggs an' pig's fry an' chitlin's from the Master's pig-killin's. You were *rich* on thirteen bob a week. We were fourteen, an' none of us ever starved. You can't get such grub in London now for a barrowload o' gold."

"You're tellin' me," chimed in Bill, the bricklayer. He had just finished rebuilding a four-hundred-year-old barn, stables, and cow-yard with two-hundred-year-old timbers salvaged from other buildings. Now he was putting the tiles on East Horndon Hall, which a bomb had blasted off.

"I lived off Marylebone High Street till they bombed me out. I wouldn't go back now for all the tea in China. Money goes farther in the country, *an'* I *feel* better. But the rations aren't enough for a workin' man. Sandwiches an' cheese an' beetroot ain't got no guts in 'em! Nor Spam!"

"Ah! goo ye an' wire [1] a rabbit," said Bob Kemp. "'Haps you London chaps don't know how to set a wire!"

"War Agricultural's gassed 'em all," retorted Bill. "Waste o' good food an' good skins. If they'd left the rabbits to the workin' man we'd ha' had 'em in our bellies stiddy of the poor things suffocatin' in their burrows."

"Lord Huntingfield was a crack shot," said Jack, apropos of nothing in particular. "Allus sent us a pair o' nice young rabbits come shootin' days. He'd come to my cottage sometimes o' dinner-time an' set down an' chat as nice as anything. Never let you stand up when he came in an' allus apologized if we was at meat."

"Jack," says the Guv'nor suddenly, in his gale-of-wind voice. "Tell Mr Day what you think o' this new Education Bill. Keeping boys at school till they're sixteen."

"Depends on what you call education," philosophized Jack. "I left school at twelve an' was on the plough when I could hardly reach the plough-handles. But I learned to be a good ploughman. I earned a man's wages when I was eighteen. That was good education, wasn't it? They paid you then for what you could *do*—not for how *old* you were!

"Nowadays they stick at school till they're fourteen an' learn a lot o' things that are no mortal use on a farm. 'Rithmetic won't

[1] Snare.

cure a sick mare, an' French won't drive a tractor, nor will Algebra help you with an old boar. Now Mr Butler [1] wants 'em till they're sixteen! Why, I was earnin' near enough to marry on at that age. What *is* education?"

To which Diogenes-like thought his better half cut in with, "Farming has enough problems an' tricks to last a man a lifetime. The younger a boy starts on a farm the better the man he'll be. If they stay on at school till they're sixteen they'll come out as cocky as roosters. Know everything and won't learn sense! My boy and girl both started young, and they've not regretted it."

"Ah! I had a nineteen-year-old boy here once," said Jack. "He earned a full man's pay. I said to him one day, "Clean your horses to-night, will you?"

"'Damn the horses! Do 'em yerself,' says he, 'I've got extra money and I'm off down to the pub!' A few bob extra had ruined his self-respect.

"No—two extra years o' schoolin' just *loses* a boy two years of real schoolin' on a farm. Two years wasted. They don't teach farmin' in schools. You've got to learn it on a farm."

I thought of Agricultural Colleges, and said so.

"Colleges! What! Breed a lot more officials that want to order other people about. *Afternoon farmers*—that's what they are!"

"You need science in farming, though, don't you?" asked the Guv'nor provocatively.

"Science! Five to ten per cent. only of farmin' is science. The rest is hard work and knowledge. Only five to ten per cent. o' men in farmin' need be scientists. The real science is how to make things grow—animals an' crops. The best apprenticeship for that is on a farm when you're young. If they know so much more nowadays how is it that they grew just as good crops, and just as much, eighty years ago as they do to-day?" Which finally finished that.

"What about the future of farming," I asked hopefully.

"Future!" said Marshal Budenny decisively. "The future is hang on—or they'll hang the farmer an' his men. You see. They let it down after the last war an' they'll do it agin after this one. Mark my words, master. The foreign grub'll come in agin cheaper than we can grow it because the foreigner pays worse wages. An' all this good land what we've ploughed up here at Pudsey and on Wallasea'll goo back to grass agin! Milk an' eggs—an' not a livin' in it for a man in twenty o' them what's on the land now."

[1] The Right Hon. R. A. Butler, then Minister of Education.

On that gloomy note the Marshal nodded derisively. Seventy years ago they christened him Albert Victor Shelley, and for seventy years he has flourished in the strong salt winds of the Essex coast. His back is broad and still strong, his face is sun-reddened, and his hair—that, he says, " has slipped back'ards." But his whiskers are the pride of the parish, more luxuriant and more martial even than those of the great Russian cavalry officer after whom we have nicknamed him.

" Money," he snorted. " I'd rather have less money that bought real things than all this money that melts when you look at it.

" Bad for marrying, too. Marry young, I say. I married when I were nineteen, an' my owd mate's still the best pal I've ever had."

" Same here," said Jack, and Mrs Revell smiled shyly the smile that had snared him under the Suffolk moon when the world was younger. " Here come the owd Member." All eyes turned.

" The M.P. for Pudsey," thin and eager-eyed, anywhere between fifty and sixty-five, emerged from a shed. He is supposed to do carpentry, mend tractors, make gates, and salve the salvage which the ingenious mind and acquisitive eye of the Guv'nor collects by the cartload. But mostly he talks. And talks.

" What pace are you, Member ? " shouted the Guv'nor. " Dead slow or full stop ? "

The Member ignored the sally and the roar of laughter which followed. He pinned me with the remorselessness of an entomologist transfixing a stupefied butterfly.

" All civil servants and officials should be made to know their jobs," he declaimed. " Parasites on motor-bikes. That's what we suffer from. Jumped-up jackanapes with a little education that goes down their gullets the wrong way, addles their stomachs, and puffs out their heads. Bureaucrats! The curse of war, sir. Worse than lice on the battlefield."

" He's off," murmured a female voice.

" Put it in the paper." The Member pursued me inexorably, wagging a minatory forefinger. " Don't soften the truth. Take the Government and the export trade now. They say all exports must go up by fifty per cent. *I* say let the Government take *all* the profits, bar five or ten per cent., from the export trade and use that money to reduce the taxes. Then we can live. At present we're all financial prisoners! "

" You'll git on the Parish Council yit, Member," yelled a voice.

"Parish Council!" snorted the Member. "I'd git in Parlymint if you'll only wake up an' vote for me. I'd cut down the fat profits an' make farmin' pay *after* the war. Fools' paradise you're in now. The end approaches—victory will bring poverty to the land. . . ." And, wagging a grizzled head, he departed into the darkest recesses of a tool-shop, prophetic oratory in clouds about his head.

"He oughter bin one o' a large family, an' then some one'd a'-clipped his tongue short fer him when he was young," remarked a member of the audience.

"Big families now," said the Guv'nor, switching to his favourite topic. "I was one of thirteen. I've got eight myself an' they've got thirteen youngsters between 'em. So that makes my tail a long one. I've got sixty first cousins and there's four or five hundred Goodchilds altogether. Most of 'em are on the land."

"They'll be a rum, fierce lot if they're anything like you, Guv'nor," said Bert, the tree-feller. Bert is thirty-five, fair, blue-eyed, broad-shouldered, and burnt as brown as copper down to the waist. He is a true East Anglian, with a thousand years of Viking blood in his veins.

"Never know where the Guv'nor'll turn up or how!" said he with a grin. "Come gallopin' across on a young horse the other mornin' like a steeplechase jock. An' when I was fallin' the rookery elms he told me he'd hull [1] me in the dyke if I cut down the trees where them owd frank-herns [2] nested. Said they was here when owd Queen Liz was kickin' up the dust. Master Tom's just as bad!" Master Tom grinned and shook his head decidedly.

I mentioned artificials, manures and insemination, to draw discussion into more academic fields.

"Too many artificials ruin the land," said the Marshal, who has been cultivating land with love and care for fifty-five years. "They're like whisky—take too much an' it'll kill you. Artificials lie *in* the soil. They don't *add* to it. Good farmyard muck—that's your man. Worth its weight in gold. Give me a good bullock yard and I'll grow crops as high as your waist and as heavy as gold."

"And insemination . . . ?" I suggested. All heads shook dubiously.

"A rum go. Might do. But I doubt it," said the Guv'nor. "All right for a generation or two, but you can't go on breeding from artificially bred stock. If you do they'll all go back to the

[1] Throw. [2] Herons.

rough old original stock. Like roses. If you don't prune 'em even the prizewinners will throw back to the wild dog-rose. It'll make a nervy, weedy stock in the end. I'd rather have calves from bulls than bottles! You see!"

I said I would, and delicately threw a spanner in the works by reminding them that Mr Hudson[1] himself had caused a shortage of cattle by orders to slaughter them at the beginning of the war.

"Him! Old Spufflin Bob!" said one. "Don't know his mind from one week to another. Always tellin' farmers to be 'efficient'! Ha! he's like the boys—probably never learnt any farmin' when he was young, an' he's too darn old to start learnin' now."

On which devastating truth the Pudsey Parliament prorogued and went back to work on the land.

[1] Then Minister of Agriculture.

V. IN ENGLAND OF THE WEAVERS

In Search of Wisdom from the Oldest Working Farmer in England—Harvesting Seventy Years Ago—Mr Bird of Westerfield Manor—On Men, Wages, 'Horkeys,' Harvests, Bulls, Old Cottages, Horses, Squires, and Deer Parks—Where They Still Pull up the Drawbridge at Night—The Moated Hall of Helmingham and the Tollemaches—Horses Again—To Kersey and Lavenham—With a Word on Joey, the Turtle Dove

While the Plowman, near at hand,
Whistles o'er the Furrowed Land,
And the Milkmaid singeth blithe,
And the Mower whets his scythe,
And every Shepherd tells his tale
Under the Hawthorn in the dale.

MILTON, *L'Allegro*

I WENT BACK TO MY NATIVE SUFFOLK ON ROBERT, MY OLD HUNTER, on a spring morning when the may blossom was white as blown snow on the hedges. Larks sang, and all the high East Anglian skies above Orwell and Deben, Stour and Gipping, were blue as a hedge-sparrow's egg. A sea-wind hustled his flock of cloud sheep above the Stour at Stratford St Mary, where, you will recollect, Constable painted that rickety, moss-grown, wooden bridge over the sliding river which was the gateway from Essex to Suffolk.

Crouched on the bank of that lucent stream, its face to the willows and glancing water, sat the old Flemish weavers' toll house, oak-timbered and awry. Sitting there in the sunlight, it demanded by ancient right its pence from every traveller who passed from Essex into Suffolk or the other way. Constable put it in his picture of *Dedham Vale*, but, alas, when I knew it thirty years ago, a decrepit ruin, it was a racked, roofless home of snoring owl and pattering rat, a place into whose spectral bones the white moonlight filtered.

That was before that gentle artist of old houses, that persuader of life into ancient bones, Mrs Roper—whom Colchester knew as Miss Errington, niece of a one-time High Steward of that walled Roman town—came along in 1934.

She soon shook the old Flemish Talbooth back into life. Men brought lorry-loads of fifteenth and sixteenth-century timber, hard as iron, from Ipswich houses which were in the knackers' hands,

and life was conjured again into the riverside home that had known the clack of looms and the guttural foreign tongue of the Flamandes when Elizabeth ruled this buttercup vale of Dedham.

I have known and loved the house ever since that renaissance in the 'thirties. They are good memories: fishing days in high summer when all the birds sang and blossom drifted on the slow stream; hunting and shooting days when the sea-wind was gusty up the valley and golden plover whistled in cold dawns; high nights of argument and reason when Alfred Munnings,[1] that superb artist of horses and England, declaimed and banged the table; and other days when one just dropped in, drank beer, and watched the river sliding.

So do you wonder that my wife and I stopped on the bridge, that mathematical monstrosity which has usurped the artless beauty of Constable's wooden bridge, and looked down upon the old Talbooth, waking up in the early sun? Two red setters yawned on the gravel.

A water rat, the English beaver, swam from beneath the crawling roots of a gnomish willow. The first daisies were out in the water meadows, where red-and-white cattle moved in slow procession, wood pigeons cooed heavily in the tall elms on the hill in Langham Park, and a green woodpecker dipped in erratic flight over the river. Spring was sweet.

We went on into Suffolk, for man cannot linger for ever by enchanted waters, through villages of red-and-yellow houses built in Tudor, Stuart, and Georgian days, villages with roofs of tile and thatch, villages wise and lovely.

Beyond Ipswich you come to the precise and maidenly village of Westerfield, and there I found an old, gabled manor house smothered in ivy, busy with sparrows and set in neat gardens and trim lawns. Two pet sheep grazed beside a pond full of moorhens bustling about their nesting. In that old manor house of Westerfield I found the oldest farmer in England. He was asleep.

"He's very deaf," his schoolmaster son, William, had warned me when, sixty-one years of age, he bicycled forty miles to see me the previous Sunday. "He'll hear you if he wants to!"

"Mr Day to see you, Dad," said his daughter.

The old man woke with a start.

"Hay?" he roared.

[1] Now Sir Alfred Munnings, President of the Royal Academy, and an East Anglian of farming stock.

"Mr Day, Dad."

"Load of hay?"

"No—Mr Day. You read his farming book[1] and wanted to see him."

"Don't want any hay—got stacks of it."

"No. No—Mr Day."

"Ha! Give him some tea. Sit down. I liked your book. Do you own land?"

"A few hundred acres."

"Farm it?"

"No."

"Ha! They that farm the least write the most. Hay?" I agreed.

"Still, you wrote sense." I bowed.

Now, Mr Frederick Bird, of Westerfield Manor, is ninety-five and still working. His family has been farming for two hundred and fifty years, a typical fine old English yeoman stock, full of common sense and wit. His wife, whose mother was a Munnings, one of that East Anglian family which produced our great Sir Alfred, the President of the Royal Academy, was his schoolboy sweetheart, a remarkably distinguished-looking woman who died not long since, at the age of eighty-seven. Of their ten children two sons are farmers, one an art master, and another a chartered accountant. Every week up to November 1943 Mr Bird attended Ipswich market and bought and sold cattle, for he is a great cattleman and a judge of pigs, sheep, and horses. That week he was starting again.

As I talked to that white-haired old English yeoman in his dining-room, with its shining mahogany and Jacobean chairs, its oil-paintings of prize cattle and steel engravings from Landseer, I reflected that Lord John Russell was Premier and Palmerston was Foreign Secretary when he was born. The Napoleonic Wars were still a living memory. There had been tarry-pigtailed sailors stumping along Ipswich quays on wooden legs got at Trafalgar, and coaches still running on the dusty roads of Suffolk when twelve miles an hour, including stoppages, was reckoned a smart pace at which to get about England. Winston Churchill's father, Lord Randolph, was only two years old when Mr Bird first smelled the East Anglian air, and farm wages were two shillings a day, with all the fresh milk, wood, pigs' fry, and chitlings a man could want, thrown in free. Beer was a penny a pint, beef and mutton threepence a pound, and cottage rents a shilling or two a week.

[1] *Farming Adventure* (Harrap, 1943).

"They didn't do so bad in the old days," said Mr Bird, with a grin. "My father and granddad never had any labour troubles, and neither did I. When old Joe Arch, the agitator, tried to start a farm labourers' union some of his chaps came to my back door.

"'We want to start a union here,' they said. 'And we want your men to join and get another shilling a week.'

"'They won't join you,' I said.

"'Why not?'

"'Because I pay 'em a shilling a week more than anyone else already,' I said. 'Because on this farm master and men know their jobs and know each other—and trust each other. We're all here for life. So be off! You're bad lots, trying to set one class against another and sow ill-will. Bad lots! Be off, or I'll set the dog on you!'

"They're at it again to-day," he added. "Look at all these strikes—ill-will in time of trouble and bad men at the back of it all."

"All my men have been with me for years—more years than I can count. Come out in the yard."

We went out, through a walled garden with a wrought-iron gate and into big stack-yards and stock-yards, with barns that were built when men wore ruffs and doublets, and other barns as modern as iron and Dutch ideas can make them.

The stockman, Cracknell, was putting some cows through a gate. "He's just sent twelve of his own pigs to market and got three pounds apiece for 'em," said Mr Bird. "I always encourage my men to keep pigs. Puts money in their pockets." I remembered the local tale that his old foreman, David Curtis, left £16,000 when he died—a tribute to pigs and prescience—which was eclipsed by the village pig-dealer, Davey, who, they say, left the best part of £70,000!

Harry Jay, with a bright blue eye and a ruddy face, was loading wood on a cart with a nice young Suffolk mare in the shafts. He looked about thirty-seven.

"Be called up soon, I suppose?" I said.

"What! Harry—he's sixty-one. They might have had him for the South African War, but I've got him now."

Harry grinned. "Guv'nor gets about well, don't he?" he said. "We never know where we're going to find him—come across him hoein' the other mornin', and then he was in my woodshed sawin' up logs last week. Rare young 'un he fare to be."

"Ah! I used to get up at four every mornin' an' milk twenty

cows," remarked Mr Bird casually. "But I can't do the bendin' nowadays. Gets me in my back. I lay in till about seven and have a nap after lunch. Gettin' on in years, y' know. But I've seen a bit of farming! If a farmer says he's broke be sure he isn't. If he boasts about his money be sure he'll go broke! Yes! Yes! Take the harvest of eighteen-sixty-nine—year of the Great Drought. We hadn't a drop of rain from April to September, and sheep were so poor they were selling for five shillin' each in Ipswich Market. I was farming about six hundred and forty acres then—a square mile.

"What a harvest we had! Nine men in the harvest field together with the four stockmen and three boys. All the men got the same wages—ten-and-six an acre—and the boys got double their usual pay for the month, with a bushel of malt thrown in to make beer. We all brewed our own beer then, and good stuff it was. None of this chemical swipes!

"We had the harvest supper, or the 'horkey' as you call it up your part of the world, after the last wain had been drawn home from the field with flowers on the horses' heads and ribbons in the men's hats.

"A good feed, too, for the men and their wives. Roast beef and plum-pudding, a bushel of potatoes, with three bushels of malt and three pounds of hops to make the beer. I put in a fat hog—weighed eleven stone—as well, and the mistress, my wife, she gave a big bottle of gin and milk mixed.

"On one day's work alone, a Saturday, we carted three fields of wheat, eight acres, thirteen and a half acres, and ten acres, thirty-one and a half acres, starting work at five in the morning and finishing by the moon at ten at night.

"We had five wagons and eight horses and three drivers on the job, averaging four loads to the hour. I gave them beer every four loads, and we stacked in two round stacks and two bays in the barn.

"Use the barn bays for stacking and you'll save ten pounds a stack nowadays, what with doing away with the cost of thatching and general waste."

I suddenly recollected that day at the Great White Horse at Ipswich—the inn where Mr Pickwick surprised the lady in her curl-papers—when, six years before, the assembled peers and M.P.'s of that part of Suffolk had presented Mr Bird with a special prize and a great cheer for his sugar-beet. Not only that, but he is the father

of the famous "Westerfield Mixture," which Suffolk farmers use extensively as an alternative to clover mixture on light and mixed soils. Here it is:

	lb.
English Trefoil	10
Canadian Alsike	2
Red Suckling	2
English White Clover	2
Special Giant Italian Rye Grass . . .	5
	21

which will do an acre for seventeen-and-six. It can be obtained from the Eastern Counties' Farmers' Co-operative Association.

"Are you the oldest working farmer in England?" I asked.

"Don't know, but I'm the biggest fool. Must be to be a farmer! My young cousin, Charlie Bird, he farmed at Honington on the Duke of Grafton's estate till a little while ago, but he's given up. Eighty-three he is. Then there are those young Bolderos at Rattlesden—three of 'em, all at school with me at Framlingham College when that first opened in 'sixty-five. But I reckon they've all given up now."

Harry Davey, the foreman, with a squirrelish brown eye and a rakish hat, joined us and Cracknell and old Tom Kennel with the game leg, and we fell to 'Parliamentin'' in the straw-yard. Opinions flew fast as chaff on a thrashing-day.

"War Agricultural Committees—lie low an' suffer 'em. You can't dunt your head agin a brick wall! But lor', most of 'em are robbers! Robbin' the land an' robbin' the taxpayer. For ever of money to spend an' not one in a dozen of 'em knows how to farm. I wouldn't trust 'em with a drove o' hogs—sooner have our land girls on the job. They *are* workers—rare good 'uns, too, even if they did come out of a drapery shop."

It was the same scathing indictment of that expensive, top-heavy, funk-hole machinery of so many War Agricultural Committees which I have heard in a dozen English counties.

"West Suffolk's asking for an inquiry into the money they spend, I see," I said. "Pity a lot of other counties don't do the same. I hear they spend a million a year in one county, and what have they got to show for it—a lot of 'officers,' some of whom weren't even farmers before the war, and land which is costing up to fifty pounds an acre to farm."

" Ah! You can do anything with any land in a war," said Mr Bird. " I always said in that last German war that they could grow potatoes on Rushmere Heath if they tried. But that doesn't mean that Rushmere Heath is the right land for potatoes! War is no judge of values. England is the only place in the world where you can't do wrong so long as you aren't found out! If it wasn't for the war half these officials would be found out. They're not farmers—don't get up early enough! "

On that succinct note we went into the barn, high-roofed and raftered, ninety feet long and twenty wide, with cobwebs in the beams. Great crossbeams sprang from wall to wall twenty feet up.

" I've ridden a horse over those beams," said Mr Bird, flourishing his stick. I looked incredulous.

" Packed up with corn, it was. And I rode a horse backwards and for'ards to tramp it down—had a ramp up at the side to get him there. We *grew* corn in those days—no Committees to ' help ' us either. Just fair prices.

" We had three hundred and fifty people to a celebration in this barn, time of the Coronation—what a merrymaking! "

We walked over to the cowsheds, and a big covered yard beyond, deep in straw. The cowsheds, concrete-floored, with run-away drains, were built on the most modern principle, but were deep in straw. He stirred it with his stick.

" They milk the cows on concrete nowadays—cold as death," he remarked. " I like to keep 'em warm. Keep 'em warm and you keep 'em happy. Always plenty of straw about here. Treads down into gold. Old-fashioned, I dare say, but my eighty cows look happy, anyway."

" Ah! They can't break or beat the old ways yet," said Foreman Davey succinctly.

Old Tom Kennel, limping, opened the door into the covered yard. Mr Bird walked in ahead. The door closed. The yard, deep in straw, afternoon sunlight filtering dustily in through the cracks in its roof, was ringed with dim boxes and cowsheds. Kennel limped ahead through the straw. Mr Bird suddenly waved his stick. " Loose that old bull, Tom," he roared. I quaked. " Like to see the bull? "

Now, I hate bulls. Bulls hate me. I have been hunted by bulls over marshes and through hedges since I was six years old. Bulls are my jinx, anathema.

" Yes, I'd like to see the bull," says I, with a backward, measuring glance at the door.

Tom advanced to a far door, pitchfork at the ready, flung it open, and yelled, " Hurrup—come on out."

Out bounded a handsome young black-and-white bull, active as an antelope. He tossed his head, galloped clumsily into the middle of the yard and rolled at us a bright eye with a dash of blood-red in it.

" Stir him up, Tom," shouted Mr Bird, waving his stick. I had a momentary, imagined vision of Mr Bird in a scarlet cloak, with a handful of darts, daring an Andalusian bull on a Spanish afternoon of blood and sand. Tom roared " Git up! " and dashed limpingly at the bull with the pitchfork.

The bull wheeled on his own axis like a taxi, sent the straw flying, and came straight for us.

" Git over! " I roared in my best stable voice. The bull got over. He turned, stood, twitched his tail, and tossed his head.

" Put him in, Tom," said Mr Bird, in a half-gale voice.

" Git in! " bawled Tom, and plunged at the bull. The bull whisked his tail, kicked his heels, and flourished into the dim recesses of his box. Tom slammed the door and dropped an iron bar with a clang.

" Nice young bull," said Mr Bird. I agreed.

" Give trouble soon," said Tom. " Allus do about tew year owd. Allus take a fork tew 'em. Niver trust a bull." I said I never had.

" Old houses, now," said Mr Bird, apropos of nothing. " I like old houses. Born in one, four hundred years old."

" So was I," says I, warming to this unbullish subject. " Nothing to beat them. They were built to last, not to fall down."

" Ah! Just so. I had some cottages condemned. When the Council told the men to go they refused to leave. They liked 'em—warm in winter and cool in summer: water out of the well, clear as glass, and walls as thick as my body; rent a bob or two a week—but these council houses! All brick and stuffiness. Hear your neighbour through the walls, and hot as hell in summer and cold as Arctic in winter. No! No! My men said no. That's ten year ago. They're still in 'em—watertight roofs and warm walls. What's wrong with that!

" I know a man in Norfolk whose cottages were condemned forty years ago. They're still good and standing! "

I thought of the old Talbooth and nodded.

" Take the old lords and squires," went on Mr Bird remorselessly. " They're trying to do away with them. Breaking up all the old estates. Why? What good does it do to anyone? Just takes

good money out of the countryside and puts good landlords out of business."

"I know! We farmed under good squires for two hundred and fifty years, so *I* do know. My father always said it would be a bad day for farmers if the squires and lords went.

"Look at the great slump of 1880. Old Lord Tollemache at Helmingham Hall and Squire Berners at Woolverstone Park and a host of other landowners all reduced their rents, by forty per cent. most of them. They were the real friends of the farmer. Colonel Tomline at Orwell didn't—it was pay or get out with him. He was the only one though. Built the Felixstowe Railway, he did. Squire Pretyman,[1] who inherited after him, was a better man—a real gentleman."

"Old Lord Tollemache, now—he was a gentleman. Put up a lot of good cottages, and every cottage had its acre of cornland to it. This one's all right too. Good landlords, and they knew every one. The old lord used to drive a coach and four from the Hall down to Ipswich in forty minutes—ten miles if that's a yard. Rare good turn-out, too.

"They pull the drawbridge up over the moat there every night, you know. Last place in England to keep up the old custom. Plenty of deer in the park—black 'uns among 'em. There's a black stag comes from no one knows where, jumps into that park every year, and fettles 'em up. Keeps the dark strain alive. He's a traveller, that owd feller.

"Come on—jump in and we'll drive over to the Hall and you can see for yourself."

A long road, every yard of which evoked a memory from the old man. Here a man was run away with downhill by a team of horses "because he was a bad man with animals and they waited till they got to that hill to get their own back—threw him out and broke his leg, an' serve him dam' well right!"

There a house was lived in by a man whose forbears had farmed in Suffolk for "nigh on three hundred years. An' his boys'll go back to the land. Can't beat that stock an' you can't raise 'em in the towns."

And so through a wooden gate and into a broad park dappled with glancing deer.

There, on a rise backed by probably the finest clump of oaks in

[1] The late Right Hon. E. G. Pretyman, President of the Land Union and a first-rate agriculturist.

any park in England, noisy with daws, stood the house. The park, which is some 306 acres, has a herd of 150 fallow deer and 35 red deer.

Helmingham is a rose-red house, low, with many mullioned windows and glowing gables reflected in a clear spring-fed moat between grassy banks. The red-brick walls of the house rise sheer and foursquare from the water. It is none of your sluggish moat water, slowly astir with carp or eels, but water as clear as a brook, alive with perch and pike, and fit, almost, by the look of it, for trout. Two old red-brick bridges partly span the moat. I say partly, for, when within a tantalizing dozen feet or so, the solid bridge ends and a drawbridge takes its place—a miniature drawbridge hauled up by chains through great sockets in the Hall walls and not from any lofty tower or beneath any lowering portcullis, but a drawbridge none the less and one which no man, however agile, could well pass. It simply hauls up and faces you with a solid wall of the most uncompromising oak, studded with nails of discouraging countenance.

Inside are long, cool, flagged passages with massive doors, a courtyard hung with the heads and antlers of great red stags from the park, and rooms with the height and grace of Tudor days. All is self-contained within the four walls and the four-square moat—the lord's chambers and the servants' quarters with kitchens, butteries, cellars, apple-rooms, game larders, pantries, wood-and-coal-stores, and even stabling for horses, built long before the other stables in the park.

It is, in fine, a perfect specimen of a fortified manor house of the fifteenth century. Set on a little rise in the park, it faces squarely to all four points of the compass. To the south, the church, flint-faced with a tower noisy with jackdaws and backed by rookery elms, overlooks an Elizabethan parsonage with crowstep gables and warm old brickwork which looks, as it probably is, as old as the Hall.

Westward, lawns smooth and bordered by yew hedges are broken by more canals and moats of water, which lead the eye over acres of old park studded by great oaks with witch-like boughs and ancient trunks wrought by centuries of time into fantastic faces and profiles. Deer graze beneath them, or lie idly flicking at flies in the sun.

Beyond the park oaks and the woodland belt and the far farms lie the old hall of Crowfield and that quaintly named manor house,

Deer Bolts Hall; and, south a little of them, Lord de Saumarez's great Italianate house and park of Shrubland, an estate which, alas, has been lopped of many thousands of its old acres in the last thirty years.

"Yes," said Mr Bird, as we sat on the grass by the moat and watched the deer move in the sunlight under the oaks. "It's a bad job when these old estates get broken up—does no good to anyone, least of all the country people round about. Lord de Saumarez was always a good landlord, but what can a man do when he's broken up by death duties but sell—and sell?

"And then, ten to one, a speculator buys the land, or some chap who farms it right out, milks it dry and moves on. We've got Lloyd George's 1910 Budget to blame for half the trouble and poor land in the country to-day. He milked it of money through the death duties, and they've been doing it ever since till along comes this war and the taxpayer has to pour back more millions into the land than ever the death duties took out of it! Talk about upsetting the balance of nature! Talk about statesmen! Political hen-roost robbers, half of 'em."

Helmingham, they tell me, is the best part of ten thousand acres of Suffolk land, in addition to which Lord Tollemache has the other family property of Peckforton Castle which sits like a fortress on a steep hill and looks out over the rich grazing-lands of Cheshire. So perhaps, as Mr Bird remarked, "he's too warm a man to sell. He's hung on so far and we don't want to see him go and new men come in."

There were evacuee children, bright-eyed little Londoners, in the Hall that spring day under the motherly eye of Miss Barley, the housekeeper. I wondered how many of them would carry in after-life a childhood picture in their minds of this warm old English home in its clear moat and of the history and good tradition which it means. One such old house, moated hall or snug old farm, with its long tradition of good work and sane values, is worth more as an object lesson in English life and history than all the indigestible 'digests' of slick economists and the half-baked 'plans' of Socialist opportunists who would like to destroy all established values and private property in order to create a bureaucracy fit only for themselves to draw salaries from.

So thinking, we left the deer and the moated hall gazing at its face in the waters and went back by the rook-noisy elms to the church, where, says Mr Bird, with sudden imperiousness: "You

must go in and look at those monuments. A rare show and very old and noble."

So in I went, up a gravelled path between the mossy tombstones with an eye of envy on that warm Elizabethan parsonage smiling among its flowers, and into a church which seemed to me to be too much restored and garnished about with mural mottoes of great piety in over-bright Gothic lettering. But no doubt it will tone down, and it is, after all, not far from the medieval tradition of brightly painted exhortations and swag-bellied angels.

The ' monuments,' almost all of Tollemaches, mailed and ruffed and otherwise habilimented, were almost overpowering in the verbosity of their panegyrics of some of the dead. But Tollemaches, some of them, have always had an odd family taste for curious nomenclature and an excess of funereal hatchments and mantlings, which smacks of the Eglinton Tournament rather than the austerity of true medieval heraldry.

This taste for architectural and decorative verbiage was brought to its peak by the parson father who christened a son Lyulph Ydwallo Odin Nestor Egbert Lyonel Toedmag Hugh Erchenwyne Saxon Esa Cromwell Orma Nevill Dysart Plantagenet Tollemache, and another son Lyonulph Cospatrick Bruce Berkeley Jermyn Tullibardine Petersham de Orellana Dysart Plantagenet Tollemache. Some of his daughters were as heavily burdened by these frolics in words which, I have always suspected, were engendered by his second wife, who came from Spain, a country whose grandees are inhumanly fond of laying weary legacies of words upon their children.

We left Helmingham Church and drove home. Coming down the hill by Witnesham, Mr Bird suddenly said, " I recollect seeing a man with a four-hoss wagon on top of this hill fifty year ago. His hosses were all twitchin' their ears and turnin' their heads as they pulled up it an' I said to myself, ' They'll bolt, certain sure, as soon as they get to the top.'

" And they did. Come past me like a whirlwind with the wagon rockin' from side to side an' the man hangin' on for life. He was a bad man with hosses and he made bad animals in consequence. You can generally blame a bad man in the background if you come across a bad hoss.

" That was a nice hoss you rode on that thousand-mile trip of yours when you wrote that last book,[1] and a nice young 'un too that your farmer friend rode. You made friends of those hosses! "

[1] *Farming Adventure.*

"We still do, and although he's rising ten that horse will be going strong at twenty," I said. "He's waiting down the road now."

"Ah! most people don't study a horse's mind enough," he rejoined.

"Hold hard. I've got an old letter in my pocket written to me by Mr Lee-Warner, of Lingfield," I said. "That very point's in it."

"Ah! Lee-Warners—good old squires," said he. "Land in Suffolk and land in Norfolk for hundreds of years."

"Well, this one was riding racehorses in the 'seventies," I said. "So he must be about your age." And I fished out a letter whose interest is such that I am sure Mr Lee-Warner will forgive me for printing it.

HEATH VIEW

LINGFIELD

Dec. 28, 1938

DEAR MR DAY,

I am always ready to inform those who like horses. I saw your Colonel to-day and I saw the Duchess. Now, have you ever thought how Ginistrelli raised that mare [1] who won the Derby and Oaks and started at 200 to 1? I can tell you that Ginistrelli might have won the Derby on more than that occasion provided the horse had been managed by him.

In 1887 I was shipping racehorses to Malta, and in the 'seventies I was riding and getting a thorough knowledge in a practical manner, and I have been a horse-keeper and groom all my life, like Ginistrelli. I have found, for some years, that all you can possibly learn from experts is what you have daily seen and experienced yourself—what *not* to do!

A horse should never be held by a bit. No horse will pull provided he has not been hurt by a bit. For the last thirty years I have proved this.

I can tell you too why a horse taught to gallop on a noseband strides a trifle longer than a horse taught to gallop under bit control.

Again the truth is that no mental experts exist on the horse. Yet there is not a racehorse that does not suffer in mind from treatment. The vet. profession does not study afflictions of the mind, but there are more horses insane than people! Further, the mind and manners of a horse are as slow and sure in development as the mind of a human, and the horse should only be coming to prime at twenty years.

Again, grass cut in May, about two inches long, makes a better food than oats. Come and see me any time.

Yours,

Z. LEE-WARNER

[1] Signorinetta, who won the Derby at 100 to 1 in 1908.

On which wisdom we relapsed into thought until, back at Westerfield, he brought out two nice young cart-horses, one a bay and the other a grey, and said, " They know me as well as my sons do—and I know them. That bay's got some pedigree in him, but the man I bought him from at forty-five pounds has never brought the pedigree. Perhaps he rather wouldn't, at that price! " Which can be taken either way you please.

And next day I stepped back to an England five centuries older than Mr Bird's robust Victorianism, six hundred years wiser than our own suicidal onrush of Gadarene ' progress.' I went back to the England of the weavers and of lovely forgotten churches.

Deep in the heart of Suffolk are some of the loveliest medieval villages, not only in England but in all Europe; villages where time has stood still and war is a mere occasional disturbance by a low-flying aeroplane.

They lie, these villages, in little valleys formed by brooks which slide and chatter under mossy bridges, between the high shoulders of great barley fields and acres of shining roots which once were nurseries of a million sheep when Tudors were on the throne and the pelt on an English sheep's back was indeed a ' Golden Fleece.'

Some time after the middle of the fourteenth century, after the Black Death had wiped out over two thousand clergy in the county of Suffolk and tens of thousands of other people, an immigration of Flemish weavers came across the North Sea and settled in valleys and villages over which the shadow of death had passed as a dreadful scythe, sweeping off men, women, and children in grim cartloads of corpses.

These early Flemings brought to Eastern England the beginning of that craft of weaving which for centuries made Suffolk, Norfolk, and parts of Essex among the richest parts of England—a craft so beautiful and intricate that it put English woollen goods first in all Europe, and, finally in the world. Lancashire, which prides itself on its weavers to-day; Nottingham, whose lace and fine woollens are unmatched; and Bradford, whose fortunes have been made from wool, all owe a remote debt, a far-off curtsy of gratitude across the centuries to a few forgotten villages asleep under high East Anglian skies.

The first Flemish weavers settled in Norwich in 1327, when Ely Cathedral was building and Bannockburn was a new memory. Others followed. Deep into Suffolk went the pack-trains, laden

with the parts of looms and spindles, guarded by great talbot dogs strong and fierce enough to pull a robber down in the mud and wrench out his throat. The Flemings, men and women, rode behind, clad in long woollen smocks and pointed shoes, topped with fur-edged mantles and fur caps. They came from Ipswich, the little wooden port on the Orwell, from Orford, with its great dour castle, and from Manningtree, on its shining mud-flats, and thence trudged and rode into the fat and sleepy land of Suffolk, always a county of holy men and peaceable.

By little brooks in quiet valleys, at Kersey and Lindsey and Lavenham, they set up their looms and built their houses. To-day kerseymere and linsey-woolsey are known all over the world, just as worsted takes its name from that other Flemish settlement at Worstead, in Norfolk.

All about them were great heaths and windy uplands, East Anglian counterparts of the Sussex downs, where grazed vast flocks of small, poor sheep. Yet, though small and poor, they were still the best in England, when the best was a poor comparison with the sheep of to-day.

You may judge of the quality of those early Suffolk sheep by the fact that a fleece only weighed about three pounds after the long coarse hairs had been combed out of it. It was worth threepence, whereas the forty-eight pounds of meat brought ninepence—a shilling a sheep. That old saying "Why spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar?" has nothing to do with ships that sail, but originated from the fourteenth-century Suffolk custom of combating sheep scab by applying tar. Prices varied a lot, and sometimes the wool was worth twice as much as the rest of the sheep. A ram cost three to five shillings, and cheese was made from the ewes' milk. The head dairymaid, who tended both dairy sheep and the small local cattle, was called Deye.

Women washed and sheared the sheep at the rate of a penny for twenty, although, in 1339, the price rose to three-halfpence a day and all their food. As for labourers' wages, these are worth comparing with the wages to-day, when a good farm hand can, and often does, earn as much as six and eight pounds a week. In those days a first-rate man was paid seven-and-sixpence a year and a quarter of corn every nine weeks. If corn was worth four-and-fourpence a quarter this meant an extra twenty-four-and-eightpence, plus three shillings for harvest. His wife earned about eight-and-fourpence for a hundred days' work a year, and his boy four-and-

twopence for the same—say two pounds a year for a family of three.

Of their food, Piers Plowman says this of the peasant's diet:

> I have no penny, pullets for to buy, neither geese nor pigs, but I have two green cheeses, a few curds and cream, an oatcake, two loaves of beans and bran baked for my children: yes, I say by my soul, I have no salt bacon, no, nor eggs to make collops, but I have parsley, leeks and many cabbages and eke a cow and calf and a cart mare to draw my dung afield, while the drought lasted: by this provision we must live till Lammastide: by then I hope to have harvested my crop, then I get dinner as it pleaseth me well.

It must not be forgotten that many peasants lived half the year in the great halls of the feudal lords, where they were fed well " and the folk enjoyed themselves, ate a hearty meal, and did not make too much noise." This state of benevolent despotism, when it ended with the Wars of the Roses, which brought in the era of rich weavers and manufacturers, prompted the lament from Piers, " Miserable is the hall whose lord and lady will not sit; now have the rich a rule to eat by themselves in a private parlour, or in a chamber with a chimney, because of the poor in the hall."

The weavers made fortunes, built themselves great mansions, and reared those magnificent and lovely churches—churches often far too big for the villages—which are the ornament and wonder of our eastern counties to-day.

They beautified the countryside, enriched both it and themselves, founded the fortunes of many a noble Tudor house—a new nobility which the old medieval barons of chivalry scorned and despised—and left us to-day a scattered nest of some of the most perfect villages in England.

So, in the light air of a spring morning when the larks sang, after that invigorating day with Mr Bird, we set out from the Talbooth in the track of the weavers, to find their forgotten villages. We went first to Dedham and Flatford Bridge to see Willy Lott's Cottage—all furbished up but still much as they were when Constable painted them and his father worked at the mill—and thence went up the road, and so through Higham, with its pink and yellow houses whose winking windows contemplate a wonderful view of poplar-lined meadows by the Stour, where kingcups lift brassy faces to the sun and cattle swish their tails in knee-high grass; past the great oaks of Tendring Park, those oaks which saw Gainsborough in his wig and satins, and so by Polstead Hall, Squire

Cooke's snug house in a valley, where they have one of the last deer-parks in Suffolk and a mighty 'gospel oak' that was standing when Domesday Book was writ. Five feet up from the ground, it is thirty-two feet round.

Down a lane I lost my way and rode into a cottage garden which ended in a buttercup marsh by the river. But a girl in a pink sun-bonnet with a rare brown face and Saxon blue eyes set me right.

And then over a bold, bare upland we went, where land girls drove chuffing, spitting tractors, and peewits stumbled in the air and wept most musically above their threatened nests. We dipped down a headlong lane, by a mill which had seen Chaucer's England, and into the main street of Kersey. It is a sudden vision—an illuminated page out of another England, a coloured echo of a gayer age.

There it lay—the long, curved street of straggling houses, each different from its neighbour, with a tiny stream striking sudden glints, like a sword laid across the path. The street dips down a little hill and climbs again—a gentle perspective with no sudden jerk or start or bold challenge. And beyond is the church, tall and beautiful.

Eaves rose above eaves, and half-timbered houses stood demure in primrose and black beside a rose-red, mullioned Tudor house whose porch—almost a little tower—and great oak door, defiant with broad nails, had stood there before Elizabeth was born.

Three small girls in bright blue, with a ragged dog whose tail and heart were high, scuttled through the water-splash and vanished in a burst of giggles and barks into a house which was really a Christmas card come to life.

My wife and I started off to look at houses. A vast inn, huge-timbered and cool, with flagged passages and a glimpse beyond of a sunny garden and cats asleep by stable doors, lured me into its bosom.

The ceilings were raftered with beams as old as the Polstead Oak, as thick as a man's thigh. It was cool and silent, with only a month-old advertisement of a ploughing match to tell you that there were no Tudor gallants about in doublet and hose and ruff.

I remarked to a benevolent-eyed landlord that it was a lovely old house.

"So they tell me," he said. "So they tell me often. But there, if yu hain't seen nothin' else for years yu have to believe 'em, don't yu?"

"Old," I said, sagely.

" Ah! Owd as owd Queen Lizzie. Owder, tu, they tell me. But there, all Kersey's like that. Don't alter much 'bout these parts, yu know! "

" War worry you much ? " I asked.

" Nothin' to sinnify. We had a bomb fall in a field year or tu back, but that didn't du nawthin' but skeer some sheep. Them planes fare tu goo oover a lot all times o' day an' night an' the 'lert goo now and agin when they hev a smack at Ipswich.

" Mostly we miss the artists and the 'Mericans. They used tu cum here a powerful lot afore this here war. Can't git about now, though. No petrol, y'know. We miss 'em, paintin' an' snapshottin' about."

Outside in the garden a turtle-dove cooed creamily in a cage. Linnets and goldfinches sang in another cage in the sun.

" Allus hev birds about, the missus an' me," said the landlord. " Friendly-like. That owd Joey, the turtle, he hev bin wi' us tharty-tu year, ever since we were married. We got him as a nipper out o' the nest, and he coo beautiful now. Rare owd boy, ain't yu, Joey ? " Joey cooed a soulful assent.

Beyond Kersey and the gaunt white bones of its great Augustinian Priory, spectral in a farmyard, lies a wood, and near it is marked the site of the Pest House, that grim building to which the poor stricken victims of the Black Death were taken to die and rot.

Through Lindsey, with its few beautiful houses, we came to Lavenham, the perfect Tudor town. It is too good to be true. Street beyond street of pure Tudor houses, with here and there bland Georgian and blushing, rose-red Queen Anne and, to crown all, a Guildhall which is a gem of cool, dim passages and panelled rooms with beamed ceilings that are as the Tudor workmens' adzes left them.

I went into the Swan and drank a pint of ale and met a man with two horses and a man with a bull in a cart. We talked of Suffolk punches and the dangers of two-year-old Shorthorn bulls, and then the man with the two horses went off " down street " to the blacksmith's shop " tu git 'em shooned up, for I'm reg'lar fond o' they tu owd bors."

I went off to look at that splendid church, one of the finest in all England, with a spire a hundred and forty feet high and a tenor bell made by Miles Gray in 1625 which, they say, has the sweetest tongue in all the kingdom. Thomas de Vere, thirteenth Earl of Oxford, who lived not far off, at Castle Hedingham, built this great church with his own money and some given by those two rich

clothiers of the town, Thomas Spring and Simon Branch. Some of the carving is as good as any in Westminster Abbey.

By then the man had come out of the smithy with his two horses.

" War worry you much here ? " I asked.

" Not a wunnerful lot," he said slowly. " Some o' these 'Merican chaps git flyin' about a tidy bit overhead, but nuthin' hain't fell on us yit. Nuthin' tu yap about. Lavenham's a steady owd place, y'see."

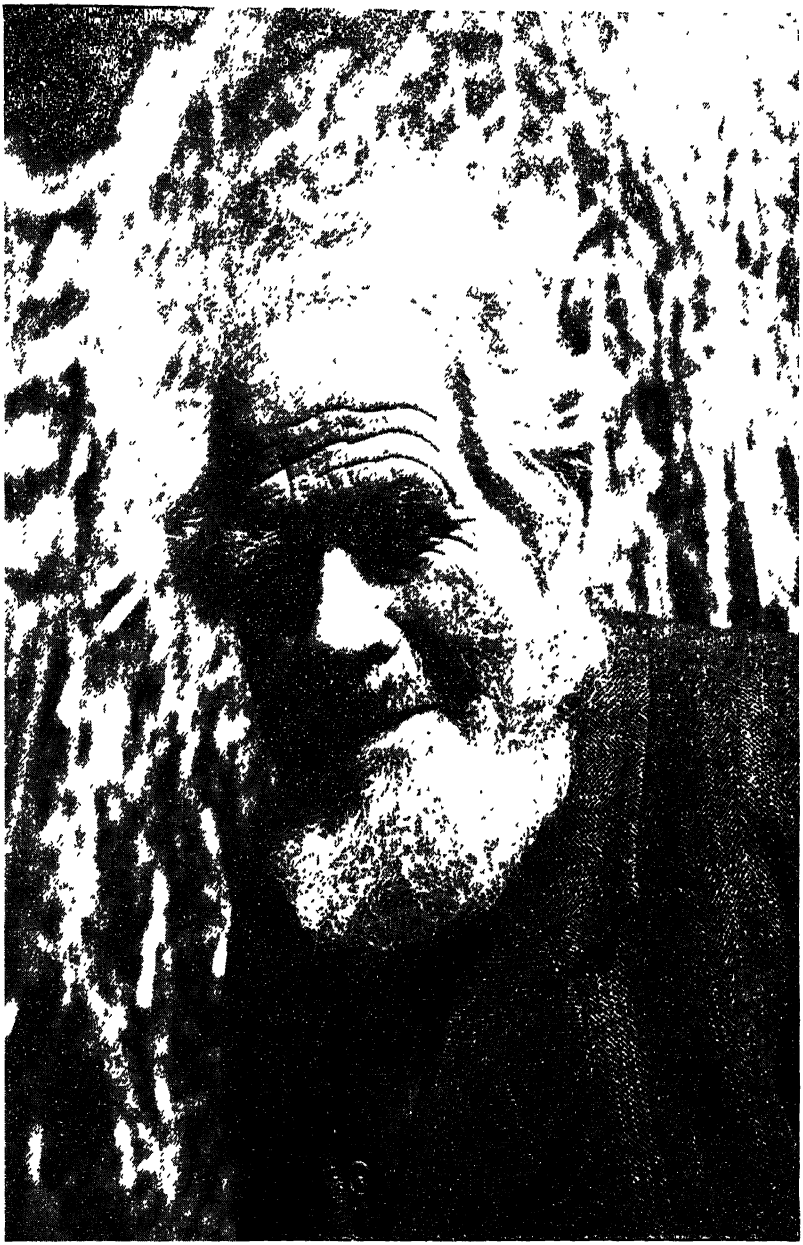
I said I did see, for it was worth going back to " holy Suffolk " in that wild year of war and of bombs by night and death by day, to tread in the footsteps of the weavers who made so great a part of England in that steady old place.

On the next night, a night of cold moon, when dogs howl and cats walk greyly, I came to Nettlestead Hall. It lies in a valley, beneath the green ridge where Offa, King of Mercia, built his camp, a valley shallow and green. The great, gaunt gateway is mirrored in a moorhen-troubled moat. Barley-fields clothe the slopes where once was a wide deer-park. A grassy meadow in which a Suffolk Punch, gold and brown in the moon, munched noisily, led to the church. By the moat huddled a cottage, snug in trees, lonely with the church in empty fields. Barns stood about, whispering to the feet of rats, and cartsheds nursed dark shadows by a rutted road which once had known the clanging tramp of men-at-arms.

An owl, yellowish-white like a great moth, winnowed under cloudy elms, which stood back in the bean-scented night beside a cart-track to the fields beyond the house—those fields where once a feudal army had lain in tents, waiting the call to France when Agincourt was the heroic dream of an unborn to-morrow.

The gateway, all that is left of that once great house of the Wentworths, their first and longest nest in Suffolk, stood ivied and grey-white in the moonlight. Strangely delicate for so old a gateway, unexpectedly slender in design, and narrow in its doorway for the entrance to so feudal a house, it seemed by those very qualities to epitomize the assured principle and the stable home-sense of those who for four centuries lived in this once great Suffolk house and overlorded half a hundred manors in Suffolk, Norfolk, and Essex. They were custodians of the Suffolk coast, raised men and horses for the King's wars, and were stout in the defence of Church and State.

No need there for embattled gateways, or a portcullis, lowering across a moat. Such a family, safe in its local loyalties, because it was faithful to its local duties, had a surer guard in the hearts of its own men than in moat or machicolations.



THE OLDEST WORKING FARMER IN ENGLAND: MR FREDERICK BIRD, AGED NINETY-FIVE, OF WESTERFIELD MANOR FARM, NEAR IPSWICH

[*See p.* 64]

Photo "Illustrated"



THE HORSEY–WINTERTON ROAD AFTER THE SEA BROKE THROUGH AT HORSEY

Photo Humphrey and Vera Joel



THE GREAT HORSEY FLOOD OF FEBRUARY 1938

"A glittering sea, wan and winking under the stars."

[*See p.* 130]

Photo Humphrey and Vera Joel

That handsome gateway, which stands eighty yards across a broad lawn in front of the present house, a gabled and Georgianized relic of the old house, has a curiously Renaissance delicacy. The form and sculpture of the fluted columns on either side of the arch, the deep entablature above, and the pediment filled with bold and graceful foliated ornament, compose a handsome whole. Two shields in the spandrils preserve a valuable heraldic record of the family alliances. The dexter shield has twenty quarters, the armorial bearings of Thomas, the second Lord Wentworth, who is generally considered to have rebuilt the original house about 1550. First come the old quarterings of the Nettlestead Wentworths, that is, after Wentworth, a crescent for difference, Despenser, Clare, Goushill, Poynton, Oyry, Tibetot, and Badlesmere; then the quarterings brought in by the builder's mother, that is, Fortescue, Stonor, Nevill, Montagu, Monthermer, Holland, Tibetot, De La Pole, Inglethorpe, Bradston, Kirkby, and Harnehall. The sinister shield has fifteen quarterings, being those of the Gosfield Wentworths, of which house were both the wives of the second Lord Wentworth, that is, after Wentworth, a crescent on a crescent for difference, Despenser, Goushill, Tibetot, Badlesmere, Howard, Tyrrell, Helion, Nortoft, Swynburne, Gernon, Botetourt, Rolfe, Paris, and Hamond.

This display of arms is of particular interest to the genealogist because it records the first southern branch of the Wentworth family. Since about A.D. 1250, if not earlier, they had been settled at Wentworth Woodhouse, near Rotherham, in Yorkshire, the seat now of Earl Fitzwilliam, to whose family it descended through Wentworth heiresses. The family expanded all over Yorkshire, and at one time had no less than seven major seats in the West Riding alone. Then, in 1425, Roger, the younger son of the third John Wentworth, of the North Elmshall house in Yorkshire, married Margery, the daughter of the fourth Sir Philip Despenser of Goushill, Lincolnshire, who had married one of the three daughters and co-heirs of Robert, Lord Tibetot—or Tiptoft, as it became anglicized from the Norman-French—of Nettlestead. Margery inherited her mother's portion of the Tibetot estates in Suffolk and elsewhere, as well as those of the Lincolnshire Despensers, and, after her first husband, John, Lord Roos, had been killed in the wars of Henry V in France, she married Roger Wentworth and thus brought him Nettlestead and half a hundred or more manors.

The old house of Roger and Margery was almost undoubtedly a strongly fortified castle, probably built by the Tiptofts, or Tibetots, in the fourteenth century. Great grassy mounds, terraces, and the remains of earthworks round the present house show the extent of the original manor house, or castle, which must have covered several acres of land within its outer walls.

Little, as I have said, remains of the second house, built by Thomas, second Lord Wentworth, in about 1550, but it was probably of early Tudor style, with a good deal of the classical decoration brought to England about that time by Italian workmen, whose influence is seen markedly in the surviving gateway. The old house had a magnificent Great Hall, whose windows are said to have been rich in painted armorial glass, an excellent record of which was published by Henry Davy in his *Series of Sketches Illustrative of the Architectural Antiquities of Suffolk in* 1827, chiefly from the notebook of Harvey, Clarencieux King-of-Arms, 1561.[1]

Part of the old house, built as a window-sill in the front of the present one, is a great stone, ten feet long and a foot deep, in which is cut the family motto, "Penses a Bien"—a scholarly and statesmanlike motto for a branch of the family which for four centuries provided great soldiers, leaders, and statesmen.

Abandoning heraldry, that enchanting distraction, I walked across the lawn to the house and went in to drink a glass of port and talk foxhunting with Stephen Fuller, who farms the old lands to-day, and hunts the Suffolk fox. It is a pleasant house within, with a white, wide entrance hall, hung with crops and fox-masks, and spacious rooms which have Georgian grace; and upstairs there is an old panelled room with the Wentworth coat emblazoned, probably removed from the original Great Hall.

We discussed the fortunes of land and that impending threat of its nationalization which, if the doctrinaires have their way, will destroy all man's inherent love of land, pride of good husbandry, and faith in building well for the future. If that deadly doctrine ever takes deep root in English soil, it will wither all ancient pride, all youthful endeavour, and starve all sense of beauty in building. There will be no need or hope for any man to plant for his son or build for his grandson. The land of England will be held in a more cold-blooded thrall than ever was clamped upon it by Norman barons or Tudor kings. And the inevitable resurgence, the foredoomed revolt, will be as sharp and as catastrophic as were the Wars of the Roses.

[1] Brit. Mus., Add. MSS. 19085, f. 115.

VI. LONGSHORE TALES

The Boat-shed Parliament on Mersea Island—And the Man who tossed Himself Overboard—When the Oars flew away—Some Odd Engines of War—The Man Full of Eels

> The low, bare flats at ebb-tide, the rush of the sea at flood,
> Through inlet and creek and river, from dyke to upland wood;
>
> The gulls in the red of morning, the fish-hawk's rise and fall,
> The drift of the fog in moonshine, over the dark coast-wall.
>
> J. G. WHITTIER, *Marguerite*

THE WIND THUNDERED OUT OF THE EAST UP THE BROAD CREEK, and anchored smacks danced a mad jig in yeasty waters. Spume curdled over the low coast road. It sprayed oyster-sheds, oyster-pits, dinghies, and piles of baskets, and laid-up yachts with a lacework of shining wet. Rigging drummed and whistled a raw wind-song. Overhead, grey clouds drove in from sea and scudded over the sea-walls and flat cattle-marshes to far dun uplands. White shafts of sun struck wild, watery notes of colour on the main sea. A shower of sleet stung like shot just to show that an East Coast equinoctial is equal to any nonsense it pleases.

It was September—wild, windy, and wet. And the first of the 'harvest curlew,' the leggy grey birds from Scots moors and Orcadian isles, were in—hundreds of them. They skirled and whistled up Salcott Creek and over Pennyhole Bottom in a whirl of grey feathers and scimitar wings—blown like rags one moment, sweeping the sleet-flecked salt water like racing witches the next.

"Cur-lee—Cur-lee—Cur-lee!" it came down the wind, that wild, clear whistle, the very soul-note of these wide flats and lonely sea miles. The Roman heard it when the Count of the Saxon Shore raised his tall white pharos behind West Mersea Church, where you may still see, in a garden, the wheel-like foundations. And before him, before the first rude stones of the Strood—that immemorial, haunted causeway between mainland and island—were laid, the skin-clad Trinobantian or Iceni heard that keen whistle at dusk and dawn when all these flats were a wild beauty of wings and fowl; when geese in armadas sailed on the waters with proud swans and white stalking cranes; when the bittern boomed in the sedges of that vanished waterway which old men still remember as a wet

creek, where is now the firm coastal road; when heron and osprey fished in grotesque competition, and the white-tailed sea-eagle was lord of all birds by day, and the snowy owl was emperor by night.

They are gone, the lordly ones—gone with the china-delicate avocet and the fork-tailed kite who nested, last of them all, in Stroodland Grove, where a lone rearguard laid the last egg in 1861. But still the curlew remains. Still, each year, on the threshold of autumn, on the first whisper of winter, the grey sea-sentinels come down from Northumbrian nests that were perhaps laid in the shadows of wall-castles built when Hadrian was Emperor and Mersea was Meresaia, the Isle of the Sea, to whose healing salt winds, the Roman sick were sent.

They come, these whaups, from Perthshire moors that heard the clash of Killiecrankie; from Hebridean isles that saw the galleys of Norse kings sail full-bellied, with ravens at their mastheads; from Shetland voes which glitter in the unearthly brilliance of the Northern Lights; from hoys and skerries, minch and sound, lochan and hag, moss and burn-head, from forest and scree, and from all the northern haunts of mists and skirling winds. Thence come the grey, skimming forms that sweep low over the racing waves, then fling to the roaring sky in a defiance of wings.

And, so musing, I bumped at the corner of Bill Wyatt's sail-loft into a burly, jerseyed figure with a wintry blue eye and a fringe of stubble, a reddish skin and a hand like a ham. Blue trousers and reefer jacket were white with salt water. Red rubber water-boots squelched on the gravel, and a whiff of niggerhead drove down the wind.

"Ah-ha! a fine sailing breeze and the end o' ma warrk," says Mr Anderson in a squall-at-sea voice. He salves aircraft. "Here am I with three airr-ryplanes to salvage—all in the mud. God knows what bombs and guns aboard 'em, an' the tide runnin' like a mill dam, an' a wind that'd blow me boats out o' the water. Look at the soldiers' fleet!" He waved a vast hand at serried ranks of stubby-bowed, squatly built motor-boats, dressed in demure battleship grey. They rose and plunged, tossed and wallowed, like grey pigs at a trough.

"'Tis no day for them wee boats at all—an' the soldier boys tryin' to anchor them in columns of fours, wi' no thought for the depth o' the water or the softness of the mud. Ay, they've got over that folly, ne doot. The grand lads—guid sojers but nae sailors!"

We joined a group of fishermen and longshoremen under the lee of Bill's shed. Backs against the tarred boards, water-boots jammed in the gravel like buttresses, jerseys grey with salt, they puffed and spoke between windy blasts which rattled the flag halyards on the yacht club mast like shot. Gulls swooped and mewed, shooting down-wind like rockets. A cormorant went down-channel, low over the waves, a black crossbow shape against the racing white-caps.

"Eats his own weight o' fish twice a day," jerked out Becky D'Wit. "If I had a spare cartridge I'd warm his backside!"

Becky is small and dark with quick, dancing brown eyes, a skin like fine old leather, and a wonderful knowledge of fowl and their ways. He is a true sea-gunner, one of the old brethren of the coast. Give Becky a punt and gun on a winter's day, or a shoulder gun in a bleak gut in the saltings at moonrise, and he will never come home empty-handed. No bird that flies escapes Becky's darting glance. He is a salt-water gypsy. I love his independence and his gaiety, his scorn of towns and town ways, his scathing tongue for those who affront him, his love of birds and wild places—all the attributes of the natural man.

Harry Banks and Tom D'Wit and a Heard from Tollesbury joined the sheltering knot under the lee of the tarred shed.

"Too much wind for you to go a-oysterin' to-day, Harry?"

"Ah! Should get blowed out of the water—but I'd like to set under Pennyhole Wall with me gun while these old curlew are on the move. My heart! I'd warm 'em!"

Tom D'Wit, tall, gentle, and hesitant, with the heart of a sportsman and the courage of a lion, grinned at Harry.

"You'd do better than that chap Tom Pewter did over at Bradwell with the big muzzle-loader!"

"What was that?"

"Ah!" chipped in the Tollesbury man, "he got hold of a rare big owd muzzle-gun, a seven-bore, or bigger, and goes out in a smack arter geese. He charges the owd gun up suffin' heavy, and they sail right into a big bunch of the black geese off the Buxey. Up jumps the geese, a hundred or more. Bang! goes the gun, and arse-over-tip goes Tom on the deck! He had his rubber boots on, and the deck was suffin' slippy. Up he gits, charges the owd gun agin while they puts about, an' hauls a couple o' geese aboard.

"Half an hour later they sails into another bunch o' geese. Suns 'em, yew know—an' Tom lets goo wi' his owd drainpipe agin.

Blast! She knocked him back'ards, and down the fish-hatch he goos an' damn' nearly stove his hid in.

" ' B—— this for a lark,' he say, as he climb out. ' She nearly done fer me that time!'

" ' Ah, bor, dew you toss yarself forrard next time sune as yew pull the trigger,' say his owd mate.

" ' Toss yarself forrard, bor, an' yew'll cheat the owd bitch afore she kick ye! '

" Well, Tom, he got right up in the bitts, an' arter an hour or so they drawed up to a nice lot o' widgeon off the Bench Head Buoy. They was a-swimming close together, and the chap at the hellum luffed 'em an' got the sun right in their eyes an' then run down on 'em fast. Owd Tom stood up in the bitts, gun to his showder, all ready for when they should jump. She run in right close afore they sprung. Ah! as thick as bees an' yew cud ha' throwed the kitchen carpet over 'em, that packed they were.

" Tom lets drive an' tossed hisself forrard . . ." he paused dramatically.

" Yis! Yis! " said his audience. " He mowed 'em down, I reckon ? "

" He tossed hisself forrard a'right," went on Heard, " but she missed fire! So he tossed hisself overboard! " A roar of laughter went down the wind.

I thought suddenly of a Friday morning when, toting an enormous single-barrel seven-bore muzzle-loader—a beauty by Wilkinson of Pall Mall—down the hard at Maldon, I was hailed by a bearded ancient sitting among the ' parliament ' which assembles each day on the hithe side: " What, hae ye got yar granddad's owd gun, Master ? "

" Looks like, doesn't it ? " I said. " I've just bought her."

" How du she shute ? "

" Don't know yet. I'll tell you when we come back on Monday."

During that bitter week-end I tried the long gun—first, as a test, at a saddleback off Northey, with a couple of ounces of B.B. shot. The big robber gull dropped like a sack of wheat, without a kick, at seventy yards.

Then off Osea after a shot at brent geese with the big punt gun, along the edge of Goldhanger Flats. It was a good ninety yards, and as the report thudded along the tide-edge the main body of the geese rose in a wild welter of wings and a hoarse chorus of cronkings.

A cloud of smoke snaked over the water. I rose on one knee, grabbed the long muzzle-loader, and let drive—this time two and half ounces of B.B. Two geese were cut down—one dead, one a winger. It was 'out sculls and after him,' and then a quick shot from the ten-bore and he was hauled in over the scantling.

We got back from that week-end with sixty-four fowl, brent, widgeon, mallard, teal, pochard, a golden eye, and a pintail or two, curlew, green plover and grey, and a bunch of knot. Snow was an inch deep on deck and a foot deep on land.

The 'parliament' was there, unfrozen and unquenchable, as we rowed ashore in the punt from the old Joseph and Mary.

"How did the owd gun shute?"

"Did well—knocked out a couple of black geese at ninety yards."

"How did ye charge her?"

"Eight drams of powder and two-and-a-half ounces of shot."

"Ha! dubble it! dubble it!—an' she'll shute fudder. Yew can load them owd guns up till they tarn ye round!"

I must confess that the prospect of doing a teetotum spinning-top act from the deck of a smack into perhaps ten or twenty fathoms of water has not yet prompted me to "load the owd gal up," as she doubtless deserves.

I told the story just as Bill Wyatt, muffled to the chin, white beard sticking out like a bowsprit, tacked round the corner.

"Bit tempesty like," said 'the Admiral.' "Ah! talkin' o' owd guns, yew knowed owd Cap'n Spitty. He had a short-barrelled owd muzzle-gun—a eight-bore. Rare spread o' shot that had. Well, he run out o' shot one day an' there was a rare sight o' knot plover running about on the mud jist in front o' a smack what was laid up. So owd Cap'n Spitty he gits his gun, charges her wi' powder, finds his owd shot-belt is empty, swears a bit, an' then his eye hits on a tin o' tin-tacks. He grabs that and shoots the lot down the barrel.

"'That'll scretch their backsides,' he say. Away he goo, creepin' up the wall by the Nothin' like an owd fox. He gits abeam o' the knots, jist where they were a-feedin' by the smack's dinghy. She was layin' on an anchor wi' her oars stickin' up over the gunwale.

"Soon as he shoves his owd snout oover the wall up gits the knots all in a bunch, *bang* goos the gun, *whist* goos the tin-tacks . . . an' what do you think?"

"Dunno, Cap'n Wyatt. He kilt a few, I dessay?"

" The oars got up out of the dinghy an' flew away! He'd nailed the birds to 'em! "

A whistle blew, and a posse of duffel-coated, thigh-booted soldiers rattled out of the Stone House and clumped down the Hard. Ted Milgate jerked his head at them.

" Ever heard how Capt'n Wyatt made that Hard keep him, Mister Wentworth ? "

" Keep him—how ? "

" That was this way. The owd hard was all stones an' shells, y'know. But when all the yachtin' chaps come about here they wanted a new 'un—didn't like gettin' their feet wet. So the Council puts a concrete hard down. Cap'n Wyatt, bein' the head man here on the beach, he advises 'em.

" ' Do you put some ringles in that there hard,' he say, ' so as the gents can make their dinghies fast when they come ashore. An' do you make them ringles stand up on *top* o' the Hard an' not on each side on it,' he say, ' so as they can feel 'em an' grapple 'em wi' their boathooks when they come ashore.'

" So they does. An' all the dinghies, soon as the tide rises and flows, gits a-bumpin' their bottoms on these here ringles until they'd all bumped a plank or two loose. That kept your shipyard right busy a-mendin' on 'em, didn't it, Cap'n Wyatt ? "

" Yis, yis," says Bill, with an ingenuous wink. " Allus a job or tew a-goin' an' a bob or tew rollin' in.

" But there—thass no good a-gittin' old if yew don't git artful! Is it ? Do ye don't ye might as well stay young an' starve! A man's gotter think up work for hisself."

The throaty thudding of a mighty engine suddenly drowned the whistle of the ramping wind. Away to the right, in front of ' the Admiral's ' shipyard—for he is lord of half the foreshore, with sheds, sail-lofts, and boathouses—a tank lumbered across the coastal road and rattled down a new concrete hard which a few weeks before had supplanted ' the Admiral's ' private slipway—a rough causeway of oyster-shells, bricks, and stones with a rusty rail running down to the water.

The tank waddled down to the spumy tide, plunged its ugly blunt nose into the waves, took it green for a moment, and then in a sheet of spray lurched bodily into the sea. The audience gasped.

" She'll founder, sure as harvest. My heart, them fools o' sojers. She 'ont live in it."

Out into the creek wallowed the ugly iron amphibian, its engines

chugging heavily, wheels and ratchets grating internally in a diabolic stomach-ache. Fifty yards out it turned its nose for the open sea and came thrashing and wallowing down the creek, its engines roaring, green sea breaking over it from stem to stern. Each moment we expected to see that unnautical monstrosity turn up its tail and plunge to a grave in the creek mud, with ten fathoms of water to hide it.

It chugged on down to the mouth of the creek, turned round, came back, did it again, and, for half an hour, played ducks and drakes in a running sea and a wind that registered full gale force. True, it was not the open sea, but the creek was half a mile wide and the tide was running. No dinghy would have lived in it. Then it came back and crawled, dripping, up the muddied slipway. Victor over the elements, it was forerunner of the amphibians which were to storm the Normandy beaches in the running seas and high winds of that June Invasion Day the following year.

It was not the least of the secrets of that immortal island in those months and years of war. A less useful and infinitely more wasteful by-product of war, a War Agricultural Committee official, in the inevitable motor-car, came round the corner, perched self-consciously at the wheel. The comments were enlightening.

"There he goo—snout in the air an' a blast o' spit about his ears!" said one.

"Ah! I knowed him afore the war—clerking it. He ain't man enough to do a sojer's job, an' he don't know the beak end of an owd hen from the tail-feathers!" chimed in another.

"Yis! Yis!" chimed in another. "But they know a wonderful lot about farmin', these War Agricultural chaps! One on 'em went bankrupt at it, so he know a thing or two! We've got a fine lot o' stand-backs to tell others to git forrard. Pity there ain't one or tew o' the right owd gentry, like our owd Sir Claude,[1] to put 'em in their places. I 'ouldn't feed my ferrets on 'em! They'd pizen the poor animals!"

"Ah! talkin' o' pizenin'," chimed in a man from Wivenhoe, "did you ever hear o' what owd Tod Mole o' Brittlesea an' his mate drudged up, Mr Wentworth?"

"No," says I. "Was that in the Colne?"

"Yis! Yis! Owd Tod an' his mate was a-drudgin' fer eels. They got a tidy big haul, an' Tod say, 'Blast, boy, these owd eels fare to be a-workin' thick here. Shoot the trawl agin.' Well,

[1] The late Sir Claude Champion de Crespigny, a local idol.

oover goo the trawl an' they trawled up the river a piece or tew. Then Tod tried the guy ropes an' he say, 'Boy, there's suffin' in the net. Haul her in.'

"So haul away they did, an' oover the side an' inboard comes the trawl. That was heavy—suffin' heavy.

"'Shoot her out,' say Tod. Out they shot it on deck. They'd got suffin' a'right!"

"What was it?"

"A dead man! Been a-layin' on the river-bottom a month or more! Course, his mother wouldn't ha' know'd him!"

"Tod take a look at it, an' he say, 'Poor chap! Poor owd feller! He don't know where he come from, dew he?'

"'No, bor. He don't know where he's a'gooin', neither,' say his owd mate.

"Tod take another look at this here poor chap, an' he say, 'He look wonderful swole to me. His owd belly's up like a football!' An' he give him a squiz wi' his foot.

"Lor! What do yew think come out o' that poor unfort'nit chap? Eels! For ever on 'em! He were full o' eels! They got a bucketful—tharty bob's worth!

"'What are we a-gooin tew dew with this poor unfort'nit chap now?' say owd Tod. 'Take him up to the police?'

"'Police! Police be blowed!' say his owd mate. 'They 'on't gie you no more'n five bob for him. Goo on—set him agin! He's damn' good bait!'

"An' do you know, sir, they drudged that poor unfort'nit chap up agin foive times runnin'—till he bruk up!"

That macabre note rang gruesome memories. No man is braver, kinder, more religious in a real sense, or more humane, than the East Coast fisherman, who lives his life at the mercy of wind and water, close to death and close to his God. But they have no false humbugging pretences or hypocritical falsifyings. A dead man is dead, and salvage is salvage; and the crabs and tide-edge rats leave grim relics on the dawn muds sometimes.

VII. SOLILOQUY IN SEA-LAVENDER

John Fell talks on Pennyhole Sea-wall—The Marsh of Singing Grasses—On 'Intellectuals' and Men—On Poachers and their Forays—The Great Black Dog—A Midnight Fight for Eels—'The Free Gunners'—Attempt at Murder—Ill-luck and the Rooks—A Great Duck-shoot and Some Shots—On Duck Decoys and Decoying

Pray, sirs, consider had you been
Bred where whole winters nothing's seen
But naked floods for miles and miles,
Except a boat the eye beguiles,
Or coots, in clouds, by Buzzards teaz'd,
Your ear with seeming thunder seized
From rais'd [1] decoy—there ducks on flight
By tens of thousands darken sight.

OLD FEN SONG

WE SAT ON THE SEA-WALL IN THE LONG, HOT GRASS. A mother-of-pearl sea shimmered landward. It shoaled into a green shallow where samphire stood tall and delicate as china and little crabs scuttled. Red pods of suæda floated into a tide-verge of stranded bentles,[2] sea-lavender stalks, sun-dried and whitened crab-shells, bits of cork, gulls' feathers, and the white down from seagoing swans' breasts. The saltings make a bay at the head of Pennyhole Creek, and from the shore of that little bay you can look clear out to sea—straight past the tall spar where the mud goes shelving out in a submarine peninsula which the Danes christened 'the Naas.'

They made their war-camp over there on the left, where Mersea Island rises bluff-bowed with trees from out the flat sea. They held that windy isle for a hundred and twenty-three years—from 893, after Alfred had defeated them in Kent, until 1016, when Canute became King of all England after the death of Edmund Ironside. Not until 1066 did Danish rule finally cease on this sea-isle. Their longships, beak-headed, lay in these shining creeks, shield-hung sides rising gently on the swell of the tide.

After them the Mersea smugglers made lawless and unwritten history on these waters where to-day red-sailed smacks built in Mersea shipyards glide down channel or fowlers go stealthily, low

[1] Disturbed. [2] Sea-asters.

on the water, in grey punts, like sliding shadows in the moons of winter. The tide shone, green and blue, across the mile of June seas between our little bay and Mersea shore. Cottages ashore slept snug and red-roofed in the heat. The square grey-white church tower with its bands of red Roman brick overlorded all—cottages and oyster-sheds, the rustling poplars with turning faces of silver, and the flat sea.

Behind us the long prairie of Old Hall Marshes melted into a far, faint background of upland corn and elms. Pennyhole Fleet, a blue arm of water, fringed with files of green reeds, snaked into the middle distance where the old red decoy cottage stood lonely, a forlorn and crooked sentinel, by the twisted thorn-trees and rustling reeds of the Decoy Pond. A thousand sheep baa-ed in that unending monotone of the marshes. And on the shining fleet gulls bickered, a shellduck laughed, and mallard rose and flew like hock bottles on wings.

Neither man nor dog nor boy nor human sound broke that level scene of silent sea and heat-hazy marsh. Even the two patrol boats in Mersea Quarters, one black and squat and ugly, the other silver-grey and sinister, swung at anchor, reft of life and sound.

The gun-barrels were hot to the hand. Sand-hoppers sprang on to the stock with automatic quickness and as quickly off again.

"Been some rum old goin's-on up these here cricks and on this owd marsh," said Fell. John Fell is brown and eagle-like, with a pair of far-away, sea-blue eyes, a crouching, swinging gait that will cover twenty miles like silk, a back to carry weights that would pull down lesser men, and an eye and a tongue for the rare fowl of marsh fleet and tide-line. He can shoot like a cock angel, run like a hare, and fight any man who asks for it.

The sun burned his skin to copper. The winds and lonely levels of the sea gave distance and clearness to his eyes. And half a hundred years of walking the lonely marsh and stalking the sea-walls have given him a loping stride which eats miles. His voice, like the voices of all men who live on wide marshes or the wider spaces of the sea, rises from an oddly gentle timbre to a far-carrying note which will talk across a mile of sea and mud-flats.

See him in his green tweed coat, full skirted, his green breeches and marsh boots, gun under arm, game-bag over shoulder, and you see a unique man—a marsh-keeper and not merely a gamekeeper. He is as much a part of the windy levels of the flat Essex coast as the wild goose or the wheeling gulls. Here is no patroller of warm

inland wood and comfortable pocket-handkerchief meadow, no rearer of chicken-like pheasants, but a man whose life is lived in combat with sea-wind and wild weather. His charges are the wariest birds that fly, their domain the lonely half-land of marsh and salt lagoon, of winding sea-wall and salting, the land of clanging geese and creeping tides.

John Fell, of Old Hall Marshes, and his father have been marsh-keepers for a hundred years on one of the most desolate spots in all England. Wild duck and wild geese, marsh hares and snipe, are Fell's children. Poachers who come stealing under the moon across the tide in low grey gun-punts are his enemies. Carrion crows and marsh foxes, handsome tail-dipping magpies and prowling saddleback gulls, are his prey.

As for that lordly pirate, the peregrine, we let him have his fling just as we spare the marsh and hen harriers on their rare and noble quarterings of the marsh. They, with the herons blown like great grey wisps across the North Sea sky, and the short-eared owls who come like eagles in autumn are altogether too Old English, too medieval in their ancient heritage of beauty, too rare in a world of commonplace murder, for us to shoot them. What if they do take a few ducks or an odd young rabbit, or if the herons do fill their gullets with silvery young eels from the marsh fleets? We can spare them. But we could ill-spare the sight of such winged beauty as you would not see on another marsh in a hundred harvest moons.

Shooting tenants may come and go. The estate may change hands again and again, as it has done. Poachers are born and die, but John Fell and the wholesome respect for his name endure. "They can't bribe owd Felly, boy! He hulled a man in the fleet once what offered him half a dollar," said a village ancient, with emphasis.

He, the man born in the marsh cottage, remains the ultimate and essential lord of the marsh, master of ducks and professor of all the arts and ancient devices for taking them.

Now, this marsh of ours is unique: eleven hundred acres of flat wild prairie, of bleached grass and singing winds, dotted with sheep and cattle, cut up by snaky, shining fleets of blue water—some a mile long, where reed-warblers swing and chatter in the tall reeds and duck raise their young in dim fastnesses on the oozy verge between water and shaking bogs. Great skies arch it, and the sea chants on its verges. Rabbits bob about in hundreds, and the curlew stalk its ant-hills with rooks and plover.

There is a decoy pond, silent in its scattered grove of wind-

twisted thorn-trees, with still the bent and rusty iron hoops and winding pipes, bearing mute testimony to the old days when they took sometimes as many as a thousand wild ducks in a day in that deadly trap.

For three miles and a half this wild, flat peninsula of cattle-marsh and pool, snaky fleet and rustling reed-bed, goes nosing out into the North Sea with, on either side, tidal creeks, wide saltings, and wider mud-flats to shut it from the world. There is no road on it but a bullock-track, no house but the old 'coyman's' cottage, red-brick and awry as the easterly gales have buffeted it, no voice but the wild call of curlew, the million trilling bells of redshank, the deathlike "Craa-aa" of the heavy-winged carrion crows and the demure whistle of grey plover and whimbrel.

At dusk and dawn and under the moon the place is alive with wild duck of all sorts. They come in from the sandbanks at sea and the inland stubble-fields, on sibilant, whispering wings, in hundreds—almost every sort of duck in the British Isles. For of this eleven hundred acres at least a hundred are permanent water, and in winter, when the upland floods gurgle down through ditch and drain, you may double it.

Mallard and querking teal; the rustling wings of widgeon and the shrill whistle of golden eye; saucy, diving, tufted ducks, and shovellers who grunt like pigs as they fly on creaking wings; graceful pintail with pencilled heads, and goosanders with the white, wild beauty of northern lochs—they all come to this marsh. Within the memory of man it has seen the golden eagle on a wandering foray south, and my own eyes have marvelled at the aerial beauty of a pair of sea-eagles.[1] The bittern has stalked the oozy verges of the fleets with its odd, gnomish air of hunchbacked deliberation, in search of frogs. And as for the mere figures of record bags, was there not the epic season when that gallant soldier and great gentleman, the late Brigadier Sir Raoul Champion de Crespigny—"Crawley" to us who knew and loved him—shot here, with Sir Mathew Wilson, and the Hon. Freddie Cripps, no less than 1,637 duck in ten mornings! All wild birds, too—no hand-reared, artificial nonsense.

And the Fells, father and son, are the two men who, for a century of winter snows and summer heat hazes, have made this marsh a paradise of duck and wild, whispering wings. To them belongs the honour and the glory.

[1] White-tailed eagle.

Old Fell was an Essex man, born and bred of a mother in whose veins ran the blood of old George Skelton, the greatest duck-decoyman in history, the man who engineered and laid out half the decoy ponds in England when such duck-traps were a necessary embellishment to every eighteenth-century nobleman's estate. Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey put old Skelton's picture in the forefront of his historic *Book of Duck Decoys*, and the original painting of the old man, in his round hat and breeches, with a bunch of dead ducks over his shoulder, hangs now in the gallery of the Duke of Leeds.

Old Fell was a big man and fierce. When he had weathered the snows and blood, the frosts and suns and the shootings of the Crimea and the Mutiny, he came home to that lonely Elizabethan cottage at the head of the marsh creek, which calls itself Old Hall in memory of some vanished manor house, and set about the business of ducks in earnest.

There young John was born, sixty-five years ago, while his father and Willsheer, the under marsh-keeper, were waging endless war with the free-gunners of the coast. They, the fishermen-fowlers of Mersea Island and Tollesbury and of that hotbed of old-time smugglers, Salcott-cum-Virley, were constant raiders by day and night of the decoy pond and the marsh. Great-grandsons of privateersmen who fought under Blake, and sons of smugglers who had run many a cargo up their moon-hazy creeks, they feared no man. Old Hall Marshes was their unlawful stamping-ground, a raid on its fleets or on the teeming nests of its great gullery a feat in which every proper young man blooded himself.

So young John Fell grew up, ducks in his blood, the salt wind on his face, and solitude his companion. It was an earthy youth with, as he says, " my hair stickin' out o' the crown o' my hat, my toes an' heels stickin' out o' my boots, and my belly always ready for grub. I roughed it, an' I'd do it again. That's the way to live long. I'm goin' on to my hundred, God willin'. Look at my owd dad. He lived till eighty-six an' then he didn't die. He jist pined away 'cos he couldn't git down on that old marsh any more. Teeth as sound as gravestones, too. Plenty o' fresh grub an' vegetables out o' your own garden an' no tinned muck. An' keep on a'goin'! That's the way to live long. I can run a mile now."

Fell has a fine Saxon disregard for all fancy titles, an immemorial native judgment of the right form of address and courtesy for man or woman. He does not raise his hat. He doffs it. " I give 'em my salute, and that's enough for any man, I reckon."

Never in all the long procession of peers and others who have shot the marsh has he addressed a man other than as 'sir.' There is the root of English address—'sire.'

"We've had a tidy few lords on this marsh time and agen, an' I got on well with all on 'em. But there was one lord had a farm not far from here—you knew him—an' he told his foreman that 'sir' wasn't good enough for him. He had to be 'my lorded.' I said 'sir' was good enough for me and I didn't know no lord but One up above, an' he'd got wings on!"

I remarked that there was a world of difference between the old rural aristocracy and the soap-boilers, brewers, nitrate magnates, political hacks, chain shopkeepers, shipowners, Labour and Liberal 'intellectuals,' and the rest of the ridiculous train of tradesmen and opportunists whom we dress up nowadays in the ill-fitting trappings of nobility.

"Ah! I guess so. Same as puttin' a Derby hoss alongside o' an old carthoss," he observed.

"Yes," says I, "except that most of them aren't as useful or as honest as the carthorse."

We talked of old fights and days with poachers. There was the night when a parcel of Mersea men led by old Abraham D'Wit, that picturesque, bearded descendant of Dutch settlers with his huge black hat, landed on the salt-marsh. They hauled their punt over the sea-wall and proceeded to net the big fleet for eels. They got a vast haul, filled their punt with the slimy, slithering creatures, and started to pull it over the sea-wall again. Then Old Fell and Willsheer, who had been hiding in the reeds, charged out and seized the stern end of the punt, which was then see-sawing on the top of the bank. Cursing and swearing, with the keepers' big black dog snarling and barking at the poachers' legs, poachers and keepers played a grim tug-o'-war. The punt rocked and swayed in the moonlight, the eels writhing and twisting to add the final fantastic touch.

Suddenly the dog fixed his teeth in one seaman's behind. With a yell the man fell backward. He dragged his companions down with him. On top of them crashed the punt, eels cascading over them in a slimy, writhing mass.

"We had 'em all up to Court, an' that done 'em a-nettin' eels for a year or two," said Fell.

"But they ain't such a bad lot o' chaps. 'Member owd Alfred Mussett? 'Swan,' they called him, arter his nevvy had shot him one night in mistake for a wild swan!



"FREE GUNNERS" OF THE SEA: THE LATE "SOOTY" MUSSETT, A FAMOUS ESSEX WILDFOWLER (*above*); AND THE LATE "GUNNER" COOK, A WELL-KNOWN PROFESSIONAL WILDFOWLER, ALSO OF MERSEA ISLAND

Photos Douglas Went, Brightlingsea



JOHN FELL SPYING THE MARSH FOR POACHERS

"He can shoot like a cock angel, run like a hare, and fight any man who asks for it."



THAT DEAD-SHOT LOOK

"A man whose life is lived in combat with sea-wind and wild weather."

Photos "Illustrated"

"He lay under the wall one day for a hour watchin' a teal swimmin' in Pennyhole Bottom on our side. I lay in the reeds a-watchin' Alfred. Finally I yells out, 'Ain't you a-goin' to shoot him, Alf?'"

"The owd man whipped round quick as light, sees me, an' yells, 'No. He ain't in my way so long as he's on your side, mate, but if he flies over this wall he'll get in my eyesight and down he'll come!' An', do you know, that owd man could have shot that bird as easy as wink from where he lay, but he was honest."

In those days the Mersea men would blacken their faces like Commandos of to-day before they raided the marsh, so that the keepers could not recognize them. So Old Fell trained a great black dog to attack and tear to pieces a dummy man stuffed with straw. Then he let it out on the marsh. The Black Hound, as the fishermen called him, became the terror of the place and filled some with an almost superstitious awe.

Fell believes that wild ducks talk to each other and pass on not only news of food, but warnings of danger. It is true enough that if you shoot at them on the water, killing some, and the rest escape, they warn their brethren, and that particular piece of water will be shunned for weeks. He is sure that they can smell acutely, and never approaches them downwind for that reason. That I fully believe, and it is equally true of wild geese.

In the years between the wars he fed his duck on 'dross corn'—millers' refuse, bean tailings, crushed acorns, and so on. In war we put down grass seeds and weed seeds, which they gobble greedily. In peace-time he and the syndicate of guns who rented the marsh sent sometimes as many as three thousand ducks in a year to the London market. This winter he and I do not expect to get more than five hundred.

As for rabbits, Fell and his guns once shot, trapped, and netted over eleven thousand rabbits in a year. This year we may get a thousand.

Old rabbits, as most country people know, warn their families of the approach of danger by thumping on the ground with their hind-legs. A doe will fight back a man or a dog in defence of her young, and Fell has been bitten and scratched by them more than once. As for foxes and adders, both have left their fang marks on his hands.

He is as gentle with animals as he is with children, who adore him. But if a marsh bull comes up at a trot with an ominously

straight tail stuck out behind him the gun is cocked and the bull had better look out. One bull was shot on the marsh as it charged. That was in Old Fell's day, after the farmer had been warned that if he did not keep it under control the result would be drastic.

" Otters, now," said John, as we sat on the sea-wall, with the gulls quarrelling on the tide-edge and all the flats shining like opals. " Otters. I've laid in those reeds an' watched the young playin' like kittens in the water, goin' head over heels down the bank, pushin' each other under an' boxin' each other like tomboys. Mother would pop up now and then with an eel an' whistle to 'em—just like a train whistle in the distance—an' then there'd be a rare scramble an' spittin' an' scratchin' before they settled down to feed. No, I never shoot 'em. We can spare the eels, an' I like watchin' 'em."

He has seen wild ducks mob a fox which tried to stalk them. They swam wildly up the fleet after him, quacking abuse at the top of their voices and flapping their wings. Reynard, discomfited, slunk off.

He has seen a whale come ashore on the mud-flats and thrash off again in a mighty cloud of spumy froth when the tide flowed, and he has watched the schools of porpoises playing under the September moon, jumping high out of the water and falling back with reports like cannon-shots. " Sink a boat they would, if they hit it. . . ."

And he has seen, winter after winter for sixty years, the wild geese come and go in their clanging thousands, heard the springtime carillon of the redshank ringing their million bells, and seen the coots, massed in hundreds on the big pool, dive like a flash in unanimous confusion and throw up a mighty sheet of spray which confounded even the peregrine falcon when he swooped from the clouds like a thunderbolt at eighty miles an hour.

" Yes, I was born on this owd marsh an' I'm a-goin' to live to a hundred, the good God willin'. An' I hope they bury me under the sea-wall when I die . . . they can have London! That ain't our country, sir."

And for that, and for much else beside, you may envy John Fell—a natural gentleman as God made him.

Old Fell, as I have said, came here as a young, fierce man, fresh from the Crimean War. He was the sort needed then to repel the night-and-day forays of the rough, marsh-prowling fishermen-gunners of Mersea and Tollesbury, in whom ran the blood of Nelson's warriors, of Georgian smugglers and Elizabethan priva-

teersmen, of Dutch seafarers and Huguenots. Hard of mind and body, they cherished the freedom of gunning afloat on salt water. To them this great marsh, won by medieval drainers from the sliding tides, was no-man's land.

It was, and still is, praise God, a half-land betwixt sea and land; a land of winding fleets and singing grasses bleached by salt winds; a land of snaky dykes and snipe-haunted, quaking bogs, wherein a man may sink and disappear for good; a place of banging great hares and weeping plover; of duck sibilant in the dawn and geese cronking in the snow mist; of snipe bleating on the easterly gales, and curlew wailing. It is the home of the heavy-winged carrion crow and the hen harrier, questing like a hound on wing. Old, bent thorn-trees shadow the decoy pond with its eight pipes and its memories of vast hauls of dun-birds and cartloads of widgeon. The bull roams its windy wastes, and sheep make mournful music. There are garganey, small and delicate, nesting on its fleets, and on sweet May mornings the titterel—that lovely marsh name for whimbrel—flute up its creeks.

It is houseless but for that lone red decoyman's hut and the nameless, historyless Georgian bricks and thin tiles of the vanished house, whose foundations faintly scar the grass by the counter-bank, where Pennyhole Fleet meets Pennyhole Bottom. Once there was a gullery, a few short years ago—a screaming, whirling-winged, cackling multitude of black-headed birds nesting in the reeds of that ten-acre lagoon which is the Bottom. But the Bottom is dry these last three summers. Sheep walk its cracked red bed, wandering that small desert like woolly Bedouins.

But when Old Fell was keeper and when Jonathan May, who followed him, was a power among the lawless ones, and when young Fell—for John is still young and gay of heart at sixty-five—followed old Jonathan, the gulls nested. Their eggs, laid by the thousand in the reed-beds and on the quaking tussocks, drew the lawless ones of Mersea and Tollesbury, who in their punts slid over the chuckling tide and stole up the creeks by night to rob the myriad nests.

"Yes, I sat under this blessed owd wall one May morning about tew o'clock—quiet as a mouse—and starlit, with the tide a-flowin'," said John Fell in a slow voice, as a man who might wake echoes, "and I seed tew punts come in the mouth of the crick from Mersea, full o' men.

"They had great wicker baskets big enough to hold hundreds o'

eggs. I laid still, me an' me owd dog, an' watched 'em. Often enough I've laid out on this wall o' nights quiet as a dead man—jest a-watchin'. One night a rabbit come and set up on his hind legs and looked me and me owd dog in the eye as straight as a judge—not three feet off. I never moved, an' no more did me owd dog. He knowed me too well to move till I gave the signal. An' that rabbit looked us over for two or three minutes, reckoned we was wood, kicked his heels, and went on a-feedin'.

"Well, this night them tew punts come right up to the wall. The men landed an' I peeked over the wall and stood up as they was a-unloadin' the baskets.

"'Well, boys, goin' a-birds'-nestin'?' says I.

"'Blest if that ain't owd Felly,' sings out one o' 'em. 'Why ain't yew abed? 'Tain't decent bein' up gallivantin' this time o' night."

"'I should be, boy, if it weren't fer chaps like you,' says I. 'You may lay that. Now what are you goin' ter do?'

"Well, we all sets down on the wall an' has a talk, an' I tells 'em that if they gits in their punts an' goes off home I'll say no more about it. Don't, I'll have 'em all up to Witham.[1] Well, believe me, away they goos, quiet as quiet, an' one on 'em sings out as they rows off, 'I'll send you a sleepin' draught, owd mate, soon! I'm wonderful fond o' a mess o' gulls' eggs for me tea!'

"But there, they ain't so bad, them boys. They like a bit o' sport like the rest on us, an' they'll dare anything. When I see 'em a-layin' out in their punts all weathers an' creepin' up cricks in the snow an' rain an' setting out half the night in mudholes full o' frost, I reckon they deserve every duck they get."

I agreed. Memories of a hundred winter days and bitter nights with those peerless men on tide-line and in the tiny, smoky cabins of shrimp-stinking smacks, of dawns cramped up with one other in a tiny punt on a swift tideway, warmed the heart. What they shoot they earn.

But Old Hall, each century since it was embanked from sea and salting, has been their lawless hunting-ground. A foray among its fleets, a raid on its decoy pond, a haul of its rabbits, or a hare stalked and shot through the tall grass on the sea-wall, is to a Mersea man what his first spear in a lion is to a Zulu boy—a badge of manly prowess. So the war between the marsh-keepers and the marsh-prowlers has gone on.

[1] The local police court.

" Owd Squire Binney always got on well wi' the Mersea chaps," said Fell. " He towd 'em that if they didn't come nearer than a gunshot from the sea-wall they could shoot all they liked on the salts, although he did once go to law and prove that the salts were the private property of the estate. They liked that, an' I had little trouble.

" But me father did. Ah! bad times an' bad men some on 'em. They'd black their faces like niggers an' come over here, punt-loads on 'em, an' fight the keepers—me dad an' owd Willsheer what worked under him—an' git their guns an' threaten to shoot 'em. Plenty of bloody snouts there was on this marsh!

" That got so bad me dad an' owd Willsheer made a dummy man out o' rags and sticks, put a hat an' coat on it, an' taught their old black retriever dog to rend it. He'd go for that dummy like a bull, growlin' an' springin' at it, an' hev it down an' rend it to bits.

" One night Dad an' owd Willsheer set under the wall up Quinces Corner on Salcott Channel. Along comes a gang o' Mersea boys in a punt. They could see 'em paddlin' along in the moon. They gets ashore, an' as soon as they crossed the wall Dad lets go of the black hound. Off he goes, quick as death, racin' along in the shadow o' the wall. He was on them chaps afore they seed him an' lep' at one man wi' a roar like a bull. They shruk out an' fit [1] the dog off an' ran for the punt wi' the dog arter 'em an' the keepers tearin' up the wall in the moonlight, hollerin' as they knowed 'em an' would hev 'em all up to Witham.

" Them chaps was mortal afraid of that dog—Felly's Black Hound, they called him—an' they piled in an' rowed off. But as they got clear off the mud one chap shouts, ' I'll shoot you, you b——s! '

" He grabs his gun an' he'd a' let fly—but he got the muzzle in the water as he pulled it out from under the gunwale, an' *bang!* off that goes under water! Burst the barrel open all up one side an' very nigh paralysed that fellow's arm an' hand. Lord, he did holler! That cured he o' shutin' at folks."

The tide was flowing rapidly now. Saltings and sea-lavender were going under. Only the tops of samphire showed like cactus spikes, with here and there a clump of bentles sticking up. Curlew were moving all over Shingle Head in grey clouds, and an oyster-catcher came flying low in towards Pennyhole. That clear, high

[1] Fought.

whistle over the water took me back to enchanted summer days in Mull and Wester Ross, when they piped up the lonely beaches of Loch Scridain and whistled in Gruinard Bay and on all the Summer Isles, lonely with sheep.

"Ah! an olive," said Fell. "Don't see many on 'em here nowadays. Used to breed on Bulls Beach up the river opposite Osea, jest as the terns used to breed on Peldon and Feldy marshes, an' the avocets on this marsh. I never shoot an olive."

He did not say why, but by some dim, inherited memory he had used, as do all marshmen, the old Saxon name, "St Olave's bird," and by some memory from a thousand years ago he had always held his trigger finger from the saint's holy bird.

Rooks and jackdaws came winnowing low over the crawling sea. They rose at the wall and cawed and jack-jacked overhead, bound for the marsh and a bellyful of wireworms and sheep-ticks.

"Do you reckon that when rooks leave a place bad luck walks in?" Fell asked suddenly.

"I do. I've known it happen."

"Ah! So it did here. Squire Binney always did well with this estate till one day he told me to get rid of the rooks in the Rookery Grove that bounds Gorwell Hall farm. I went in with me gun several nights about midnight and shot 'em up on the nest till they all cleared out. Then Squire Binney began to say as he'd lost a lot o' money. Nothin' went right. Didn't even get the ducks on the marsh like we used to. Sheep got the scour an' died. Cattle got out. The owd bull gored a man. Finally Squire Binney sold up.

"When the Belgians had the place in the last war[1] the rooks came back. The Belgians' agent chap, he got up in the top of a tree one day an' pulled his gun up after him on a long string and shot down into the nests till the rooks give up an' cleared out.

"What happened? Loewenstein pulled all the panelling out of the Court—lovely owd stuff what'd bin in Bourchiers Hall for hundreds o' years till they took an' put it in the Court—an' sold it to a foreigner up in London for a thousand pound. That didn't do him no good. That pannellin' had allus been with the estate. Loewenstein, he went queer an' chucked hisself out o' an aeroplane over the Channel. They never did find the body. That finished him! Then the estate went all to rack an' ruin, till Mr Hortin come along an' put all the housen, the Court, an' Bouchiers an' all the cottages an' the owd Ship Ahoy and Old Hall, where I lived, all

[1] The late Alfred Loewenstein, the financial adventurer.

in good order. Now the rooks is comin' back, an' the Madam [Mrs Hortin] on't hev 'em disturbed, so I do wholly hope the good luck's come back to the place."

I told him the tale of my old home, that small, five-hundred-year-old manor in the Fens which had been in my mother's family for three hundred and fifty years—always a house of good and happy family life, of children and dogs and good horses and high farming and of acres that were added to acres through each generation.

And then, one night, as my grandmother lay dying in that ancient house, the rooks which had nested about it for four centuries rose up in the night.[1] They cawed a strange, wild symphony under the rising moon, far into the night, wheeling high under the stars, plainting in the moon-mist. At two in the morning the mistress of that old house, which had lain undisturbed for so long on its peninsula among the meres and fens, died. And the rooks rose higher and higher in the star-lit sky, cawing loud and long, until villagers woke beneath their thatch and murmured that a soul had taken flight. So, also, the rooks took wing, never to return.

With them went the luck and the acres. My uncle, as good a man as ever crossed a horse's back, gambled acres and houses, flocks of sheep and herds of bullocks—all gone with the wind on Newmarket Heath. A horse in which he once owned, but sold, a share—Robert the Devil—was beaten on the post for the Derby. A fortune which he won when Blue Gown won the Derby for Sir Joseph Hawley vanished in a year. In the end the land was sold, the house went, and the Master was left without men, money, or farms. To-day the house is back. Some of the land has returned. When the rooks come back the luck will turn, full-tide. I told Fell this.

"Ah! I reckon if a man do a evil thing or gamble his good sense away the good God gie ye the hell you're a-goin' to have in this world. A man what crossed me committed suicide a year later. Another man who did me a dirty piece, he kilt hisself too. An' a third one on 'em died in his chair when he reckoned he'd got years to go." He gazed at me with bleak blue eyes.

"So you can put the evil eye on 'em, can you?"

"Not me. I'm no wizard ne yet a wise man. But there's bin for ever o' sich about in these marsh villages for hundreds o' years. Wise women what could cure anythin' from warts on a finger to glanders in a hoss. Rum owd gals, tew! Wouldn't do to cross

[1] I have told this story in *Sporting Adventure.*

they! They'd put a charm on ye! There's one on 'em not above tew mile from where we set now. I'd sooner give *her* a nice pair o' young rabbits than I would a black look! D'you keep clear of the likes o' they, sir."

This belief in witches and wise women still lingers in many Essex villages, far more so than in Suffolk or Norfolk. The average villager will not admit it to a casual stranger, and, like many other things, you may wait years to win a man's confidence before you are told many things which are current knowledge in the village itself. The Londoner who settles in a rural district may live there for years and be as complete a stranger to its life, ways, and beliefs at the end of twenty years as he was at the beginning. The mere fact that he or she *is* a town-bred person will, in the first place, debar them from receiving rural confidences. There is a reason for this, ancient and immovable.

For too long too many superficially clever townspeople have impressed upon the countryman that he is dull and slow and a fool. And the countryman, who is none of these things, but remarkably wise—with an age-old, natural wisdom—incredibly cunning, and as shrewd as a magpie when it comes to judging other people, retaliates by shutting the townsman out of his life and his confidence. He lets him know just so much as does not matter and cannot be derided. The rest is silence.

As for the sandals-and-dirty-feet brigade of 'intellectuals' and Bloomsbury hacks who, of late years, have infested parts of Essex, particularly round Finchingfield and the Colne Valley, they and their untidy women and rabbit-like morals are butts for the most ribald and devastating rural humour. It would wilt even their smug conceit if they heard it. We do not, thank God, suffer the affliction of the breed much on the coast. The east winds and the mud see to that.

Instead, the marshes and the tideways have always drawn a particularly English and admirable type of man—sportsmen and yachtsmen to whom cold and exposure, wind and tide, loneliness and the wide skies, are an uplift of the soul, a challenge to the heart.

Many a daring E-boat commander and submarine skipper, many a destroyer's captain and Merchant Navy man, learned his first love of the sea, threw his first desperate challenge to the sea, in small boats and smacks round these bitter creeks and on the wide tides and yeasty shoals, graveyards of ships, which lie between the Maplins and Orford Light.

And many a dashing soldier has shot over these wide marshes of Old Hall and waded the treacherous mud of its fleets in the cold dawns of autumn and the snowy eves of winter.

We talked of some of those great shots and daring sailors as we left the wall and walked up the fleetside to the decoyman's cottage—of old Dr Salter, the grand old man of Essex, who shot these marshes for seventy years, bred three Waterloo Cup winners, and was still riding and shooting at eighty-nine; "Crawley" de Crespigny,[1] whose initials 'R. de C.' are burned into the mantelpiece of the cottage with a red-hot poker; Lord Lewisham, that magnificent shot who once declared that this marsh is the second finest duck shoot in England; the late Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, a hot-headed, impatient shot who would not take advice.

We recollected C. W. A. Scott, that pioneer of world aviation, sailing these creeks from his Mersea cottage, and, after him, Augustine Courtauld, whose heroism on the Arctic ice-cap will remain a landmark in the history of Polar exploration.

I thought too of that gallant, dreamy, delightful boy, Chris Buxton,[2] who, when he stayed at my shooting-cottage in the Old City at Mersea, loved these tidal flats and the singing winds, the great cloudscapes and moving masses of shore birds.

Chris Buxton was tall, red-headed, shy, and idealistic, a beautiful painter, with eighteenth-century manners and the hands of a master on a horse. He lived for painting and steeplechasing, wildfowl and racing, poetry and the sea, and he feared nothing. A rare combination of the virtues of that excellent and unmatchable product of these isles, the cultured English gentleman. No country in the world can produce their like or their better. Standardization alone can kill the breed.

So talking, we came to a reed-built hide in the tall reeds by the fleet side, where a mother shelduck swam agitatedly, scolding us as her parti-coloured youngsters dived like water acrobats.

"That's where Mr Hortin shot a hundred and five duck between half after six an' half after nine one winter's morning in nineteen-twenty-nine," said Fell. "They came in from all points of the compass. Worthington-Evans could have come near that on the Decoy Pond one day if he hadn't shifted his position. I told him to stay where he was. But he always knew best. Bull-headed!

[1] The late Brig.-General Sir Raoul Champion de Crespigny, Bt., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

[2] The late Captain the Hon. Christopher Buxton, 12th Lancers.

"Ah! but the old Doctor[1] put the cap on the lot when he shot fifty-two afore breakfast in snow up to his knees one morning—an' him eighty-three. He was a blood 'un!

"Yet when I come here first—after Jonathan's May's day—you wouldn't kill ne more than fifty duck in a day if you was lucky, an' 'haps a thousand rabbits a year. We got that up to fifteen hundred duck and eleven thousand rabbits in one year! Could be done again, too."

He was right. If any man with sense and knowledge were to buy Old Hall to-day, use an excavator to dredge out many of the overgrown old fleets and dykes which have become mere floating bogs, like a Norfolk 'hover'—death-traps to man or beast, for if you sink you sink in ten feet of mud—lead the upland land drains into them, plant a few acres in the middle with buck wheat and barley, and shoot the place sparingly, he would have the best marsh in all Essex, and one of the best in England. It would not cost much money and would show good dividends, for, with one hundred to one hundred and twenty acres of permanent water, the shooting would command three hundred pounds a year rent and the rest of the marsh could carry easily a hundred cattle at a shilling a head per week and a thousand sheep at sixpence each per week. A good keeper and a good shepherd with a nimble-footed saddle horse could, between them, range the marsh, 'look' the stock, and warn off the poachers. The result would be a paradise for the wildfowler and one of the best stock-fattening marshes within fifty miles of London.

We climbed the sea-wall at the top of Joyce's Head Fleet. The long lagoon wound away into the marsh, glittering in the sun. A cock pochard, his red head shining like old copper, swam serenely not thirty yards away. He did not move at the sight of two men and a dog. Somewhere his dun-coloured mate was sitting on eggs in the tall reed-mace. A grass-snake arrowed out of the old wooden cattle-pound and wriggled up the wall, glistening. Fell made a convulsive start, stick upraised.

"Leave it," I said. "He'll do more good than harm. If it was an adder . . ."

There are few adders on Old Hall, unlike Langenhoe Marshes, where, in August and September, we dare scarcely move, except in rubber thigh-boots and with guns cocked. Adders are queer creatures. You will find so many on one particular marsh, perhaps only a ten- or fifteen-acre piece, that it is impossible to turn horses

[1] The late Dr J. H. Salter, of D'Arcy House.

or cattle on it between March and October, and yet a field and a dyke away scarcely one will be seen, and on the next farm, a mile off, they will tell you they have not seen one since Grandfather's day.

As for grass-snakes sucking eggs, I have yet to see it to believe it. There are plenty of tales, but few witnesses.

"I saw one o' them 'grassies' by a partridge's nest t'other side o' the Roach Hole yonder," said Fell. "He laid alongside ten eggs. When I come back next day the snake was still there, but the eggs had gone."

"Yes," says I, "and so probably had a pair of old carrion crows or a saddleback gull—or a man!"

The tide was full-bank by now. All the salts from Joyce's Head to Tollesbury yacht-sheds, a mile away, were under. A forest of masts rode above a silver sea at Woodrolfe, where the sheds and spars of Drake's village shipyard nurse one of the finest yacht-builders in England. Far-off elms stood, green-cloud-topped, almost with their feet in the flooding tide. A vast flock of peewits, rooks, and starlings went winnowing off to the upland fields, where curlew were already stalking bramble-dotted old pastures in search of leather-jackets. Heavy-winged, a heron flapped low over the shining tide, his hoarse "Fraa-ank" echoing over the flat water. Rock pipits flitted up the wall, and a redshank cried "Teu-heu-eu! Teu-eu-heu!" and flirted her white-barred tail.

"Pleu-eu! Pleu-eu! Pleu!" and whimbrel went scything off low across the water, putting up a mixed lot of sandpipers.

"He's late—or uncommon early," says I, shading my eyes. "They're generally away from here by first week in June and not back till mid-July. Still, you never know what you'll see if you keep your eyes open."

"Yes," says Fell. "I've seen widgeon here in June and a Great White Stork in March, 'twenty-nine. 'Member I told you about him at the time? An' a golden bittern one August. That ain't all the rare birds that gets into the books, is it? You'd think the way some o' these writin' naturalists puts dates an' years to birds turnin' up, that they never come along till them chaps was on the go with their field-glasses an' scribblin' books. But they ain't up all hours an' all days an' most nights, them fellers!"

I looked over the waters, far spreading, and out to the sea, where a smack was reaching under jib, foresail, and topsail, and thought that if one cannot have an island a peninsula is the next best thing.

It keeps people away. And if it must be a peninsula be sure that the bull is loose on the landward end!

We dipped down the wall by a gang of sunburned men making concrete blocks for facing the sea-wall. They, the employees of the Essex Rivers Catchment Board, are the lineal successors of the old race of ' wallers '—a tough, primitive type of sea-wall navvy, who were unique in their way and most admirable men when you got to know them. They were the coastal equivalent of the ' fen-bankers ' who for centuries mended and kept in order the thousands of miles of river walls which protect the Great Bedford Level in Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire. I remember them well as a boy—hairy men, with mahogany faces, red neckerchiefs, corduroy trousers gartered below the knee with tar-band or sedge-band, moleskin waistcoats and great, thick, nautical-looking reefer jackets of pilot cloth, their trousers thrust into claystained high-lows, and their heads into peaked caps which added the final amphibious touch. They were Wild West heroes to me in my Fenland boy-hood and on my occasional visits to these coastal marshes. They knew an amazing lot about winds and tides, their fall and scour; about rivers and dykes and the flight lines of fowl; the slides of the otter; the run of a marsh fox; and the ' red earths,' where the rabbits breed in thousands. In the Fens they were great eel-spearers and tench-ticklers, netters of plover and linnets, catchers of Fen goldfinches that went with the linnets to the bird-markets of City streets. They could catch jack and eels when all orthodox anglers were defeated.

Here on the coast you might be sure they knew the ways of the fowl, and the autumn run of the eels on the salt mud. They prowled the marsh-walls at half-light of dawn for the wounded widgeon and black geese left over from punt-gunners' shots under the midnight moon. They netted the fleets for eels when lookers and marsh-keepers were abed. They were afoot and in the know when more than one smuggled cargo was run over the walls on foggy nights and taken far inland to ancient churches stranded in thorn thickets, to farmhouses snug within moats and to the caves which were dug in the gorse and heather wastes of Tiptree Heath. The wallers had a finger in most pies. They were the men, too, who, as often as not, were first to discover the poor, rat-eaten, gull-pecked corpses of drowned men cast up on shore on mornings after wild gales at sea. It was a mercy if the waller was early on the scene before crabs and carrion crows got to work.

To-day the wallers work with mechanical excavators, which loom starkly across the marsh, instead of with pick and shovel. They drive rubber-tyred lorries bumping across the anthills instead of slaving at lines of wheelbarrows and four-wheeled wagons with straining horses. They can still set a snare with the best of their grandfathers. And I do not doubt that they have still the same old wisdom of wind and the workings of tide. Like their grandfathers, they are neither landsmen nor watermen, but men whose lives are lived betwixt the two, keeping the one from overflowing the other.

" Here comes the shepherd," said Fell, cutting in on my ruminations. " He's a Dorset man, name o' Lawes. Hain't been about here above four year, but he's a wily chap an' know his job. Got a long string tied to his tail—eight kids—so he'd have to know it, to feed that brood! "

Across the marsh a humped figure, stick in hand, strode among the thistles and anthills, blue-grey bobtail at his heels, a sack over his shoulders. We met at the sheep-trodden causeway between the Teal Pond and the far end of Joyce's Head—a merry-faced, black-haired young man with a blue-black stubble and a pair of brown eyes that met you with the same directness as the searching gaze of his dog.

" A rough old place Oi do zay," he said when I asked him how he liked it after the Dorset downs. " A man du need a hoss tu git about here if he's to do arl his work. 'Tis a wide run for two legs, but Oi du loike it well enough." The broad sweetness of the slow Dorset accent struck a foreign note after the harder Essex accent.

" Foxes—aye! Oi've done vur noine on 'em zo fur an' have me eye on zix more. Fair big as sheep, zum on 'em! Otters tu—Oi zee their work in the vleets. More 'an one on 'em. Oi have me eye on 'em tu—a zovereign a skin they are. Oi've 'ad one big dog 'un in my traps twoice a'reddy, but 'e 'ave got out each toime, one toime in the vleet an' one toime on the saltin's."

I pleaded for the otters, but he winked, and murmured " a zovereign a skin," so, reflecting that " the long tail on him " would call more potently than any plea for otters, I gave up. After all, these seagoing coastal otters are no fools, and are well able to take care of themselves. Moreover, the man who does not keep friends with the shepherd on a shoot deserves to lose his birds and hear no hints of poachers!

We talked awhile of shepherding on the high downs above Cerne Abbas, where the larks bed in the thyme and the Giant Man strides

in the naked chalk, and of Blandford, " where I did work vor Capt'n Pope. You do know 'ee, the brewer. 'Untsman's Ales, an' good they is. 'E was a rare gentlemen, tu. Allus came up to my sheep-shed, an' if I 'ad people a-watchin' me at work—tourists an' loike—would say, ' Ah! company I zee, Bill,' an' 'ud leave me. But if I were alone 'ud allus come in vor a chat an' a smoke. None o' this stuck-up stuff loike zum o' they War Agricultural chaps wi' their ' Shepherd this, an' Shepherd that.' A gentleman. A man 'ud work vor a man loike that."

We left the shepherd with a parting " Du 'ee foind oi a nice zaddle pony if ee can, zur," and walked on to the decoy cottage. It stood, as it has stood for two hundred years, rose-red and crooked, beaten sideways by endless winter gales. Its shingled roof is reddened by countless summer suns, and its one tiny window winks out across the reedy fleets and rough marshes to the shining sea. The peregrine has perched on its roof-tree, and the owl whitens its doorstep. It has one room down and one up a narrow wooden staircase, which is hidden by the fireplace. A cupboard, with a few plates and cups, a water-filter, a pepper-pot and salt-cellar, a pile of cracked plates and empty wine- and beer-bottles, and a heap of sawn logs from old marsh rails—those were all the domestic goods and utensils I found when I opened the cupboard door. A rusty kettle stood in the fireplace, and on the mantelpiece, pricked in the wood with the end of a red-hot poker, were the initials ' R. de C.'—mute echo of nights here before dawn flights, when that splendid fellow, poor " Crawley " de Crespigny, had the shoot.

A pile of rabbit-nets hung from hooks in a beam, four camp-beds stood against the walls, a couple of safari chairs and a water-tank, a pair of old red rubber water-boots, an up-ended box bearing the legend: " Christopher & Co. Ltd., Pall Mall, S.W.1"—lament for vanished rum and port—a pair of wooden decoy ducks on a shelf, a bit of German bomb-casing on the mantel-shelf, and a rabbit's skull, an empty cartridge-case or two, and a bunch of snares on a hook behind the door. Those, and a mass of cobwebs and feathers, were the sole furnishings of that lonely hut on the marshes, three miles from any pretence of a road. The wind whistled through the broken bottom of the door, and two panes gaped glassless in the window. I went up the narrow stairs. They opened directly into an attic under the shingles, lit only by a hole in the wall where the collapse of the keeper's room next door had torn plaster and bricks away. A shoal of pigeon feathers told a tale of marauding falcons

and owls eating their dinners secure under this lonely roof. The wind stirred the feathers faintly.

I went below and walked round the hut. Four posts and a tangle of loose barbed wire showed where cattle in search of shade had torn down the fence. The keeper's room at the east end was a jumbled ruin of board walls, leaning and flat. Amid them lay broken bottles, a torn and rotten mattress, a ferret-box with leather hinges, a drunken sofa on three legs, and a rusty water-tank. At the west end a wooden lean-to, comparatively intact and earth-floored, held a barrel of sheep-dip, a lantern, a crook, a couple of rabbit-traps, and a stool.

" Shepherd uses it, but we can put a bunk or two in here and be as snug as bugs," said Fell. I thought of January blizzards and searching winds, and nodded. At the back, in the shade, a huge white-faced Hereford bullock and a shaggy Highlander, with a sweep of horn like a bush buffalo, lowered at me as though debating a charge. Flies were their preoccupations.

A couple of hundred yards away the thorn-trees and grassy banks of the decoy pond made an island in the marsh. Reeds showed rusty and green through the thorns.

" Come an' see the 'coy yard," said Fell. And there he used a word I have never heard anywhere else in England, although once, years ago, I spent a summer visiting nearly every decoy, derelict or otherwise, in East Anglia. I can find no mention of a " yard " in Folkard or in Blome or Daniel. It is certainly not used by Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey in that authoritative book *The Book of Duck Decoys*, nor, as far as I can remember, by the late John Whitaker, of Rainworth Lodge, Notts, in his shorter work on the same subject. Yet it has a ring of authenticity.

So to the 'coy yard we went. Cattle had knocked and twisted the thorn-trees which once made a sheltering thicket about it. Rabbits had burrowed in every direction into the raised banks hiding the reed-screens, from behind which the 'coyman watched his reddish dog lure the wild duck up the netted pipes by his antics and tumblings. The curved pipes gleamed with water and were green with young rushes, but the over-arching netting had long since gone. There are eight of them. The decoy pond and thicket, which is one of the most ancient in Essex, covers fourteen acres. It was half-full of water, with a shore of sunbaked mud between water and tall reeds whose roots were white-stained from long immersion. A coot rose with an almighty *hooroosh* and went

swift over the reeds to the far shore, where he dropped into a reed thicket, full of alarm.

"I've seen the widgeon and pochards come in here in thousands," said Fell slowly. "Sometimes if you'd come down here early in the fog on a December mornin' the whole pond seemed to get up and fly away. Yon way was where I saw the only Montague's harrier I've ever seen on the marsh, an' off that point the old Doctor shot a garganey and a gadwall both in one mornin'. Yes, yes, we've had some rum rare 'uns in here. An avocet one time, an' a grey phalarope time or two, an' a marsh harrier in the old Doctor's time, and a white-tailed eagle too. You never know what'll get up!"

Dr Salter, who worked this decoy till about 1890, took mainly duck and teal. Widgeon preferred the Marsh House and Grange decoy ponds near Tillingham, in the Dengie Marshes, south of the Blackwater. The Marsh House decoy is still worked, the last one in Essex, and one of the last in England. Dr Salter also took that rare Essex duck, the long-tailed duck, who is usually only found far out at sea, and pintail, shoveller, pochard, golden-eye, mergansers, tufted duck, red-throated divers, as well as an owl, a snipe, and, oddest of all, a kingfisher.

For those who do not know, a duck decoy is a pond from which radiate three to eight curved channels called pipes. These pipes, which narrow as they leave the pond, are covered with netting, which terminates in a small, detachable net called a trammel, which lies on the ground at the farthest and narrowest end of each pipe.

The pond is always situated in a wood or thicket, far from noise, is kept as quiet as possible, and is tenanted by tame decoy ducks, pinioned, whose work-life is to lure the wild birds down.

The mouths of the pipes are flanked on each side by tall reed screens, overlapping each other and continuing to the trammel end. The interlapping spaces between each screen are connected by small reed screens, a foot high, called 'dog jumps.' Between the screens and the water's edge is a narrow path about eighteen inches wide.

The decoyman waits until the pond is full of birds, then, choosing a pipe *towards* which the wind is blowing, he and his dog—the chief and most valuable actor in the whole business—begin operations.

First, the decoyman, hidden behind the screens at the mouth of the pipe, whistles the feeding-call to the decoy ducks and tosses a handful of grain over the screen into the water. The decoys rush for it. The wild birds follow them. A few more handfuls, thrown

over screens farther up the pipe, and then, as the ducks follow the food, the decoyman's dog, the 'piper,' does his bit.

Leaping over a dog-jump, he trots along the narrow path, the length of a screen, in full view of the ducks, pops over the next dog-jump, and disappears. Up goes every duck's head, and, with an immense quacking and hullabaloo, the wild ducks follow the dog. They do this partly because the dog is almost invariably liver-coloured or rusty red, and they mob him in mistake for a fox, and partly out of curiosity. In the same way peewits will mob a dog on a field, or curlew will stoop at any dog running about on a salt-marsh. I used to send my retriever out, hide behind the sea-wall, and shoot them as they whirled about his head.

When the dog has repeated his trotting, jumping, and disappearing act and has drawn the ducks round the corner of the pipe, where they are unseen by other birds on the pond, the 'coyman shows himself behind them. The terrified birds immediately rush up to the narrow end of the pipe and pile into the trammel net—which is on hoops—trying to escape. The 'coyman then unhooks the trammel and takes them out one by one, wringing their necks and throwing them on the ground.

I have once, and once only, worked a decoy, and that at Orwell Park, Suffolk, where the owner, the late Ernest George Pretyman, told me that no fewer than ten thousand fowl were taken in the winter of 1918.

To-day there are barely a dozen decoys still working in England.

At one time, a hundred and fifty years ago, there were over a hundred, and they took half a million fowl a year. A decoy cost about £100 to £200 to make, about £40 to £80 a year to run, and netted anything up to £400 or £500.

The best bait for fowl is oats, buckwheat, and hemp-seed oil. The latter should be dashed over the oats and buckwheat, giving them an irresistible flavour to ducks. Another good mixture is malt-coombs with a dash of aniseed oil.

I have rented five decoy ponds in all at various times—Goldhanger Widgeon Pond, Goldhanger Gore Pond, Bohuns Hall, the Glebe at Bradwell-juxta-Mare, and Old Hall—and have shot on four others used as flight ponds, so I can speak from practical experience.

No one can put a date to the Old Hall pond, but it is one of the oldest in the kingdom and probably dates from the reign of James I or James II, when not only were decoy ponds introduced by the Dutch, who called them Eendecooys, but the marshes themselves

were probably embanked. I fancy that the ruins, or rather foundations, at the seaward end of Pennyhole Fleet are the remains of the first decoyman's house, which was probably put there as an outpost to guard the decoy against poachers from the sea and to overlook the vanished Teal Pond, a smaller decoy which lay there on a piece of marsh now called Eel Pie Island. Decoys are still most strictly protected by law, and very heavy damages can be obtained from anyone who deliberately disturbs one.

To the man of imagination there is something immeasurably sad about a deserted and derelict decoy. It is as potent to stir inherited memories and pictures of far-gone days as a deserted farmhouse or ruined hall, a church in a wood, or a broken-down, rotted staithe at the end of a forgotten creek.

I thought, as I stood there in the rustling reeds, the sea-wind salt on my cheek and the reed-warblers chattering, of the old 'coyman as he probably was a hundred years ago—a rough, unlettered man, living a hermit's life here on the marsh, a man of mystery even to the creekside villagers. They, with their smuggling and longshore fights with the Revenue men, had enough of their own affairs to keep secret.

He would be clad, like as not, in a fisherman's blue guernsey, a moleskin jacket and round moleskin cap, corduroys, and waterboots—a creature of the wild marsh, one with the ducks and the hares. His only companion would be his reddish dog, a half-bred terrier-mongrel, for no woman would face life in such an outlandish spot, hidden half the year in sea fogs and the other half baked in the hot sun reflected from the sea.

I could see him scything his reeds in winter, patching his netting in summer, eeling in the fleets and taking gulls' eggs and peewits' eggs in the green days of spring. He would be at perpetual war with the coastal flight shooters, sworn enemy of the punters, whose nightly cannonadings would fright his fowl.

A silent, morose man, he saw few people, acknowledged no master but the squire up at the Hall, that Captain Isherwood, who, in 1857, moved from Bourchiers Hall to the new and not particularly handsome—but very comfortable—Guisnes Court, which he had just built out of the stones of Old London Bridge.

The fruits of the decoy, those "almost fabulous numbers" of fowl, were a comfortable part of the income of the estate. It is a thousand pities that no accounts were kept, or, if kept, that they should not have been preserved.

I can picture the 'coyman sitting by his tiny fireplace at night, the beams hung with fowl, widgeon, mallard, teal, golden-eye, and the rest, his bed in the corner a couch of sheepskins, his pot boiling on the hook, his dog twitching in its fireside sleep, and, outside, the North Sea gale roaring over the marshes, buffeting the shuddering cottage. It is a closed and forgotten page of English country life, the 'coyman and his almost vanished art.

Back across the marsh in the level light of the summer evening sun, the red walls and roof of Old Hall itself—no hall, but a large keeper's cottage—glowed, and the long, low frontage of the old Ship Ahoy inn winked its windows at the falling tide, which creeps almost to the doorstep.

It is Elizabethan, that inn, and it long held a licence but is, by an odd paradox, a farmhouse which sells no beer. And, they say, not only is it haunted, but it has buried treasure hidden somewhere beneath its brick floors—likely enough some half-remembered legend of a once-buried smugglers' hoard. .

Old Hall stood empty, but a bull glowered from beneath the plum-trees in its trampled and fenceless garden, and black-and-white Friesian cattle dotted all the wide green marshes that run down beyond to the snug, thatched church and tiny cottages of that forgotten creek-head village, Salcott-cum-Virley. It is all Salcott now, for of Virley there is nothing but a ruined and nigh-vanished church, a burnt-out inn, a lonely rectory, and that sentinel farmhouse Virley Hall, where dwells my robust and Elizabethan friend, Tom Mann, epitome of a John Bull Englishman.[1]

[1] *See Farming Adventure.*

VIII. DAWN WATCH ON OLD HALL MARSH

The Terror in the Night—A Fine Morning's Work for the Carrion Crows—The Wisdom of the Old 'Sea-wallers'—The Snake and the Vole—A Snake's 'Legs' and Spectacles—Birds in the Half-light—On Ducks, Gulls, Crows, Swans, Foxes, Terns, and 'Titterels'—The Bomb on the Marsh—Stone Curlews and Mangold Wine—The 'Prairie' Fire

> . . . The fowling piece
> Was shouldered and the blood-stain'd game-pouch slung,
> On this side; and the gleaming flask on that;
> In sooth, we were a most accordant pair.
> And thus accoutred, to the lone sea-shore
> In fond and fierce precipitance we flew.
>
> "DELTA," *The Fowler* (1808)

ACROSS THE MARSH FROM SALCOTT CHANNEL TO THE REEDY coils of Joyce's Head Fleet, where the pochards nest and the reed-warblers chatter and swing, there runs a long counter-bank. It is grassy and old—perhaps two, or even three, hundred years old—and no one knows who built it, or who dug the deep ditch which runs like a fosse on the eastward side of this rabbit-riddled vallum. It may have been old Van Cropenbrough and his baggy-breeched, wooden-shoed Dutch drainers, when they were busy embanking land all up this Essex coast from Canvey Island to Walton Backwaters, when the Stuarts were on the throne. It may have been earlier, far-forgotten Saxon villeins labouring phlegmatically when a Bourchier or a de Vere was lord in Bourchiers Hall and the sea was a constant enemy treading the skirts of the manor, flooding the low fields, and drowning the wandering swine. It may even have been the Romans, for they were busy enough on these marshes, with salt-pans and oyster fisheries to feed the tables of the centurion of that cohort of Stablesian Horse over at Othona, or of the Count of the Saxon Shore when he built his white light-house and look-out tower on Mersea.

It is a very old bank indeed. You feel that its dust is the moth-like dust of history, stirred by the feet of almost every sort of man who has trodden the echoing stones of English history. It goes winding across the hillocky marsh, among a million anthills and a thousand sheep, this little Hadrian's Wall; a rampart against the

enemy—that is what it is. The enemy—that glittering, moving sea—lies, hungry and waiting, always waiting, a mile and a half to eastward.

There, beyond the far sea-wall, is the eternal nightmare of the marshes. Imagine, for a moment, this winter dread, this threat to the marshmen's home: the fear that one winter night the gales will get up and boom, the saltings go under in a smother of boiling tide, the waves lash and batter until the sea-wall trembles, until the trickle through a rabbit-hole becomes a cataract, the bank sways and bulges. Then, with a sudden roar, the wall bursts and that hairy-headed monster, the sea, crowned white with spume, breaks in, high-maned with whipping spray, a thunder of trampling waters shouting to the stars.

Great pieces of sea-wall, big as houses, are tossed far out on the marsh. The full-throated torrent sweeps in with a roar that thuds through the black night. The wail and whistle of curlew are drowned by the thunder of the pounding flood. The sea has come back to claim its own, the low lands which man wrested from it three hundred or more years ago.

And, far out on the marshes, cattle gallop, wild-eyed and cock-tailed, for the 'red-hills,' [1] where they huddle with shivering sheep. The salt water curdles up the dykes, floods into the fleets, slides, evil as snakes, up the low-ways, and finally covers all—dyke, ditch, fleet, rabbit-warren, anthill, thistle-clump, and reed-bed until only the trees and twisted thorns on the mounds about the old decoy pond stand hairy above the starry flood, and the old decoyman's cottage winks its one window like a cynical eye at the conquering sea.

The sheep will drown in hundreds, of course. They were always the greatest fools on earth where water is concerned. Their woolly carcasses will bob by on the flood like so many derelict old women, raddled and indecently pathetic—a fine morning's work for the carrion crows and the strutting magpies.

But, far up at the landward end of the marsh, the old counter-bank will call a halt to the waters—if too many rabbit-holes are not drilled in its scarp.

As the spreading waters curdle over the marsh, at first a few inches deep, then a foot, then two feet, they come up against the old bank. It is not high, but it stands on a higher level than the

[1] Mysterious small 'hills,' or plateaux, found on many Essex marshes. Their soil is invariably red, and they are supposed to be the remains of Roman salt-pans.

low marsh towards the sea, a level so high that the top of the old bank is only a foot or so lower than the level of the bottom of the upland fields a mile behind it. And so it halts the waters. The great inland sea that once was sea, then marsh, and now has gone back to sea, falters and stops. There is no great drive of deep waters, lashed by a gale, to batter down this old counter-wall. Merely a shallow run of wavelets that have neither depth nor volume. So the farther line of marshes to the west—Cow House Marsh, Fleet Piece, Coarse Marsh, and the low marsh by the sluice at Bulls Bars—are all saved, and the cattle and sheep upon them.

That is the nightmare, and that is the purpose of this old counter-wall—to counter and throw back as a reserve line the threat of total flooding, should the outer sea-walls go. Only by good luck and good management has that nightmare been prevented from becoming a reality. Many a winter night of scudding clouds and shouting winds did the squire lie in his bed ' up at the Court ' and wonder if the morning sun would gleam on shining acres of lost land and drowned stock. Many a night has Archie Rice, that keen-faced marsh farmer with the grey sea eyes, lain under the low red tiles of the old Ship Ahoy and heard the barges grunt and squeak at their moorings beneath his windows, heard the gales buffet and the waters slide and hiss, and prayed that the dawn would not bring a ghastly harvest of horned cattle jostling each other, dead in the yeasty creek, and sheep swept like drowned bolsters far out on the saltings.

It happened at Havengore and New England, those lonely, drowned islands inside the Maplins. It happened again at Brandy Hole and Bridge Marsh Isle, up the Crouch, and on many another marsh round this flat and bitter coast that goes shoaling out into the sea. It is the marsh farmers' nightmare, the marsh-landowners' bogey.

For centuries that queer, semi-amphibious race of men, the ' wallers,' have mended and tended these hundreds of miles of great sea-walls, banks sometimes thirty feet high and sixty feet wide at the bottom, which are the ultimate ramparts of England on this coast. From father to son the secrets of tides and tide-sets, of scours and bores, eddy and backwash, have descended. These men knew every foot and yard of the walls, and the effect of every veer of wind and run of tide. They knew the growth and decline, inch by inch, and foot by foot, of every island, from the ' mud-horse ' in mid-creek to the shores of Osea and Foulness. A waller would lie

in his bed at night, his ear tuned to the roar of the wind in his chimney-pots, and tell by its voice and direction the height and strength of the tide on a marsh ten miles away.

"She'll be over the Cob Island to-night and a-hammerin' on Marfleet Wall. Like enough that'll goo, an' all the Wick Mush'll be under, time that's light." And you might be sure that he was right.

The great salt-marshes [1] which fringe the coast to a depth of anything from a few yards to a mile are the natural outer barrier against the force and scour of the tides. Sea-walls by themselves would have to be doubly strong to withstand the full force of an easterly gale or a roaring sou-wester were it not for the saltings which break the force of the waves and rob them of their under-tow.

To-day the old race of 'wallers,' with their moleskin waistcoats, blue sailor-like reefer-jackets, corduroy trousers, red water-boots, and bright blue-and-red neckerchiefs, their picks, shovels, barrows, and long planks, and their handiness at setting snares, have given way to gangs of sunburnt fellows in blue-and-brown dungarees armed with great draglines, spitting, clanking excavators whose giant arms can be seen for miles across the marshes, and movable cement-mixers. They are the employees of the Essex Rivers Catchment Board. The Board has taken off the landowner's back the personal burden of repairing the walls, and, in return for paying a rate, he can lie abed at night and listen to the winter gales with a light heart, knowing that the responsibility is no longer his.

But there are, of course, plenty of old men and farmers who say that the Board, with its quick, modern methods, its machines and concrete slabs for wall-facings, is neither as expert in practical knowledge nor as sound in its methods as the old wallers who worked methodically, foot by foot, and knew every rat- and rabbit-hole in the walls, every weak spot, and the effect of every tide scour on it. Certainly, when a wall 'blew' it was seldom or never the fault of the wallers. It was the price of the farmer's neglect to keep his wall in order.

"'Member when there was a leak in the wall by Joyce's, and the water was runnin' in at the bottom through a hole about two foot wide?" said Archie Rice, at Old Hoy Farm, to me one day.

"I do."

"Well, the Catchment chaps come down an' started to plug the

[1] Saltings, or salt ings—salt meadows. From the Saxon *ing*, a meadow. They are covered by high tides.

hole up with clay from the *inside* of the wall! Of course the tide soon blew *that* stuffin' out, and the water come in worse'n ever.

"Well, there was five or six chaps on the job with a lorry and tools, an' presently along comes one o' the engineers in a car with a surveyor. They stood about, an' the engineer tells 'em to stuff the hole up again.

"'Beg pardon,' I said, 'but wouldn't that be as well to find the entrance to that hole on the *outside* of the wall? Sure as you stuff that up from the inside the tide'll get in and force it out again."

"'What do you know about engineerin'?' says the engineer, sharp. He was riled.

"'Nothing,' says I, 'but I've got sense in my head!' They stuffed it all right!

"But, Lord, eight men, a lorry, and a car to stuff up one old rabbit's-hole! Old Smithy, the waller, would have done that job with a spade and a wheelbarrow!

"Now they've run the excavator all along the foot of the wall beyond Joyce's, inside the Flats, an' scooped out the *bottom* o' the wall to put stuff on the top! Walls were never built for that sort of foolery."

I thought of Archie's plain common sense and of the threat of a winter flood as I crept up the ditch beside the old counter-bank that first morning of August duck-shooting. It was four o'clock, which means two in the small hours by God's time, grey and darkish, with a faint yellow-greenish tinge beginning to creep into the sky over Abbotts Hall Marshes and away beyond Feldy to the sea. Mersea Island, tree-crowned, slept like a great ship on plum-coloured waters.

In the waters of Salcott Channel a bargoose led her flotilla of seven young, breasting the ripples. A heron stood, ghostly, on the mud, dreaming of young eels. Gulls quarrelled drowsily and flitted overhead, half-seen in the dim light. Curlew bubbled at their feeding, and once a harsh "Kor-ew! Kor-ew!" startled all the redshank on the creek-side into scared pipings, as a cock curlew took off in sudden, clattering flight. I wondered if an otter, undulating down the wind like a great snaky cat, had disturbed him.

Across the marsh, below the level of sea-wall and salting, the counter-bank snaked into the woolly greyness of the wide marsh. I edged forward, treading like an Indian. Larks, asleep in the grass, fled upward with quick trills of fright. In a 'low-way'[1] a buck rabbit sat up suddenly, ears cocked, eyes large and round, listening.

[1] An East Coast term for any valley-like depression even if only a foot or so deep.

He was not more than fifteen feet away. I could have blown him to bits. Then, as I moved, his hind legs beat a sudden tattoo and he was off, white scut bobbing among the thistles.

The strong smell of a fox lay like a palpable thing in the 'low-way' beyond. It seemed to fill the nostrils and cling to the clothes. Farther on a white gleam in a reedy dyke hastened my feet. A sheep, three-quarter-grown Border-Leicester, lay dead. Its off hindleg was lacerated for six or eight inches, the bone showing white. Maggots were hard at work in a seething mass of corruption. The carrion crows had already had both eyes out. I turned it over. A good fleece, but the underside was already going, and patches of wool heaved where the maggots were busy. A brass-and-copper wire rabbit-snare on the lacerated leg told its own tale. Poachers' 'wires' cost the lives of five or six sheep, each worth thirty to thirty-five shillings, a week on that marsh. Some of the Catchment workers are not above suspicion.

A thin squeaking in the grass, high-pitched and keen as a razor-edge of sound, a rustle and waving of grass-tips, and into the ditch wriggled the black-and-yellow head and greenish body of a grass-snake. He was about two feet long and in a hurry. In his mouth was a tiny field-vole, its hindquarters already swallowed, its funny, blunt-shaped little face, so like a miniature baboon, convulsed with fear and squeaks. I jammed the butt of my gun on the snake's middle, his jaws shot open, and out fell the field-vole. Then I put my foot on the snake's head, and that was the end of him. But it was too late to save the vole. Fear and constriction had finished it. The pathetic little brown body, with its fine coat of miniature fur, was shiny with the snake's saliva.

I do not usually kill grass-snakes—they do far too much good—but those tiny, agonized squeaks, that scared little face, were too much. The snake lost his breakfast and his life.

I picked up the body—it was twitching and exuding that watery mess under the scales, the smell of which stays with you, like the smell of a dead man, all day—and examined his 'spectacles,' for all grass-snakes have a horny membrane over the eyes to protect them, since they are lidless, from the dust. When the snake 'sloughs' his skin he casts the spectacles also, and grows a fresh pair. As I pressed the hard under-tips of his scales I could feel the rudimentary 'legs'—two dozen or so—which are the snake's rib-tips. By contracting and expanding them he can literally 'row' himself over bare ground at great speed.

Later the same day, as I was pushing the duck-punt up Pennyhole Fleet, I surprised a grass-snake swimming in mid-fleet, head well up, beady eyes darting from side to side, body rippling along in an easy, effortless style. The sharp bow of the punt was almost on him before he dived. Grass-snakes make good pets, if your mind works that way, and they soon get to know their owner.

I rubbed my hands in the dry earth to rid them of the cold snake-smell and walked on, half-bent, eyes on a level with the marsh. It is surprising how much you can see if you remain hidden and make no noise. Most people walk about like telegraph poles and then complain that the countryside is empty, or that everything is too far away to watch.

A carrion crow sat on a black post by an old sheep-stank.[1] His blue-black plumage and pickaxe beak gleamed sombrely in the growing light. A sheep's skull, white and eyeless, lay at the foot of the post. The two, the bird of death and the skull, made a fit combination in that level grey scene in the half-light. I thought suddenly that such a sight had marked the track of the Danes up these creeks and over these changeless marshes a thousand years ago. There was little enough difference, save that the skull was that of a sheep and not of a man. Later the dun crows, or hoodies, whom the Norfolk marshmen call the 'Denchmen,'[2] will come in foggy autumn mornings, and the two robbers, alike in everything but colour, will join forces and, maybe, breed. Carrion crows mate for life, but they occasionally interbreed with the hoodies, and you come across a parti-coloured hybrid.

My bird saw me almost as soon as I saw him. "Craa-aa!" and he was off, yawing over the sea-wall to spend the next hour searching for crabs and mussels. They take them high up over the wall, drop them on the stone facings to crack them open, and then come down to feast on the remains.

Other crows were beating the marsh or sitting on posts, scanning the anthills and low-ways. Nothing—eggs, or young or wounded birds—is safe from them. A pair of skylarks taking a dust-bath in the scrapings from a rabbit burrow fled upward in quick fright, and then, high above the marsh, burst into dawn song.

The sun was strengthening now below the rim of the sea-wall, and the trees on distant Feldy Marshes—that long black line which houses a rookery of eighty nests—became less blurred. Sharper,

[1] A sheep-walk across a dyke, usually an earthen bank.

[2] Danish men or Danish crows. Also called the grey crow or Royston crow.

like cardboard figures cut out against the lightening sky, the masts of smacks at anchor in the creek became finite. A cormorant flew over, purposeful as a black crossbow, for the wider waters of the Blackwater. Two pochard came out of Joyce's and whizzed overhead, going like bullets. Then ten curlew, grey on down-bent scimitar wings, so high that they must have been bound for the Colne or an inland harvest field. Through the glasses I could see the curved beaks, the steady beat of those wings.

Ahead loomed rushes and mare's-tails still heavy with dew—the Teal Pond. Three and a half acres of water, reeds, and slime, it is a sure find for teal, a beloved haunt of snipe. A punt lay, black, in a muddy bay, and a moorhen, scandalized at her breakfast, ran, tail-flicking, into the reeds. A coot swimming farther out refused to be hustled and departed sedately, his bald pate gleaming, into a thicket of bulrushes. Only one teal was at home, a hen, and she rocketed out of a corner and was away in a flash. Reed-warblers chattered, and a kestrel sitting on the gate-post swung off in a swift glide and went winnowing away, low, like a brown streak.

Beyond the gate and the cattle causeway the headwaters of Joyce's Fleet showed weedy and silver between high walls of reeds. A duck took off on quick wings, and a snipe rose in a zigzag and went scaping off. Normally one would have expected to see from a score to a hundred duck rise in a thunder of wings, but three seasons' drought had soured the waters and the inevitable neglect of war had done the rest. What duck had been hatched had already cleared off to the sweet waters of the vast reservoir, four miles inland, a lake five miles long and a mile wide.

I walked up the side, on a sheep-trodden verge of black soil, in a broad dip which in normal years would have been all shining water. My head was on a level with the thistles on the cattle-marsh, the fleet a mere shrunken shadow of itself, perhaps twenty yards wide. The sky, pale grey as a dove's wing, was lightening now. White fleecy clouds began to show against a background of palest bird's-egg blue. The night air, which had been oddly warm, changed to the chill of dawn. Gulls were coming in from sea and the salt-creeks in scores, settling on the marsh in a graceful confusion of wings. They dappled the pasture and perched on the anthills in clamour. Rooks and jackdaws began to drift in over the opposite wall, waddling and hopping in the morning search for sheep-ticks, leather-jackets, wire-worms, slugs, beetles, and the rest.

A sandpiper rose with a shrill whistle and fled up the fleet, his

little white rump gleaming. A pair of swans with four cygnets in convoy, so lean and dirty grey that they seemed half visible against the furrowed water, swam out of a reed-bed, the cob grunting angrily. Had they been on wing I would have knocked them down, for there is no more priggish and brutal a bully of young ducks than the swan. He is the lord of the pool and the first to dirty it.

Half an hour's stealthy prowl up the fleet-side and I saw no more than a heron—better sight than a dozen swans—a swarm of reed-warblers who sang within two yards of my head, and a party of four shoveller. I smelt a fox too. Then the head of Joyce's came in sight round a bend, and the sea-wall beyond. A cloud of gulls rose with a clamour, and peewits swept over the wall. I climbed it cautiously and poked my nose over. The tide was half in, Joyce's Flats were opal and silver, the saltings alive with curlew in herds like grey sheep, a tern dipping and flashing over the Channel. Fishing-boats slept in Tollesbury Channel, and on the far ridge of Tollesbury, with its cottage chimneys not yet smoking, red roofs showed. The church, sturdy, red, and squat, glinted its brave weather-vane, a local smack in copper, to the sun. Away on the right tall trees and the dim woods stood plum-coloured about the orange walls of old Bourchiers Hall, the hidden red-brick of Guisnes Court.

Suddenly, out of the flat sea-silence of the east, came a faint drumming. It grew nearer with incredible speed—a vaster, throatier noise, as though it came from an immense barrel. And, even as the sirens suddenly wailed, it came out of the east, under the last pale stars—a small torpedo form, winged and devilish, riding through the dawn sky sharp as an arrow. I glanced at my watch—six o'clock, and the first flying-bomb of the day. It ploughed across the sky over Tollesbury, the hoarse roar of its jet propulsion making hollow echoes in the empty sky. Then suddenly, over Goldhanger, a sudden sheet of flame lit a flat fire along the low clouds, the bomb dropped straight to earth with a tail of light—*boom*—and a cloud of black smoke pillared into the sky and flowered like a fantastic, evil tree. It had fallen in a bean-field near the medieval walls and gatehouse turrets of old Beckingham Hall, the ancient ruin that had known no fiercer engines of war than catapult and arbalest. So much for our civilization on an August morning.

Moorhens squeaked in the reeds at the report, and a water-rail set up its stuck-pig squealing. The gulls went on preening and

beetle-catching, the rooks strutted, and the heron raised his stately head. Then the marsh went back to normal.

Four black-tailed godwit—the best sight of the day—swept up the Channel, saw me, and went tittering into the clear dawn sky, graceful as dancers. They are rare and safe. One does not shoot rare birds here if one can help it.

A dark figure was coming across the marsh, dipping into dykes and low-ways, rising into full view on the rolling folds of this irregular prairie, which still preserves the irregular face of the saltings and rills from which it was reclaimed. Through the glasses I could see it was Fell, swinging along in his green coat at a pace that eats miles. I want to meet him among the sheep.

" Breakfast's ready, sir," said he. " They're all at the 'coy house. The Colonel's[1] got a pair of ducks and the French colonel's shot what he calls a stone curlew—never saw one before—and two duck and a bagful o' waders. Did you get anything ? "

" No—but I saw a lot and I've enjoyed myself."

Back at the old 'coy house the fire was crackling, tea was boiling, a kettle hissing. We ate cold rabbit-pie and bread-and-cheese and onions and tea, with a bottle of beer to top up. Fell drew the water from a cask which had been brought down on a cart. It tasted faintly ciderish.

" Ah! Mangold wine. I used to make a lot o' that," he said. " One pint o' that an' a rabbit'd set up an' box a fox. A good old drink, but you don't want too much of it." I asked him how he made it.

" Get a big sweet mangold, about four pounds' weight. Scrub it well and then cut it up in slices. Put it in a gallon o' water with a squeezed lemon and a handful of hops, and bring it to the boil. Then draw the fire so that it no more than simmers for an hour. Strain that off and add three pounds of white sugar to the water when you've got all the bits of mangold out of it. Bottle it up or cask it and hold it for six months, filling it up with water as it evaporates. Then you've got a drink."

We talked of other country-made drinks—elderberry wine, which is like wood port; and currant wine, which will banish any cold; and potato wine, which is no more than our old Irish friend poteen and as fierce as a ferret; and plum wine, which is heady and brews trouble; and cowslip wine, which is the fairest drink of them all bar one—the good Saxon mead made from honey, the English-

[1] Colonel Robert Adeane of Babraham.

man's most ancient drink, and the best. I drank it when I was a boy in the Fens, and it and the rest of them are better than all the soda drinks and sundaes and synthetic trash which an artificial, over-commercialized civilization pours down the gullets of its anæmic city youth.

The stone curlew lay on the window-sill. Its long yellow legs and big yellow-rimmed eye and boldly streaked grey-and-brown plumage brought back sudden memories of shooting and walking days in the Norfolk Breckland with Dick de Grey, that whimsical, gallant friend—old, far days on lonely heaths and by flinty ponds and lost meres, among the hot bracken and pines, when the stone curlew ran like ghosts on the ancient brecks and whistled clear and high on nights of stars above Tomston Water and Stanford Mere.

Claude[1] had shot a pair of them in the grey dawn, but the other had been lost in the reeds. I mourned those graceful, luminous-eyed birds stricken on their long flight from some Spanish marisma or stony plain to the Norfolk brecks. They are old as the neolith, ancient as the airways of time, cœval with the vanished bustard and the cranes which once flew south from Saxon fens. Robert Adeane chipped Claude and said that a Frenchman would shoot robins if they looked at him.

We sat in the one whitewashed room of the cottage, the kettle hissing, the fire of barge timbers spluttering, and the sea-wind playing in at the door. Huge, shaggy black mountain cattle and white-faced Herefords came and looked in at the door, and curlew whistled overhead. Fred Lawes, the shepherd, peered in on his rounds and reported a dog-fox in a reed-bed by the decoy pond, while his two wise dogs, old, white-muzzled Bob and sharp, foxy-faced Nellie, conducted armed parleys with Peter, Claude's retriever, until Claude, swallowing his last nip from a bottle of Calvados which tasted equally of cider, perry, and brandy—he had brought it, with a bullet splinter still wedged under one eye, from Brittany the day before—seized his gun and went off to slay the fox. Robert and I slept on camp-beds while the sun came up over the sea. Fell tidied up, the black bullocks gazed in, huge-horned like buffalo, and the swallows chittered on the roof.

An hour later we woke. Claude had bagged his fox. The dogs had chased the bullocks off. A smack's sail was gliding above the sea-wall, and a hot sun danced on the marsh. Flies made butchers'

[1] Lieutenant-Colonel Count Claude de Boislambert.

music round dead rabbits and slain ducks. The wooden decoys on the shelf in the corner stared primly.

"Eels," said John Fell suddenly. "Now, if we had a net we could draw the fleet, an' I'll warrant we'd get a rare draught o' eels. Eels in there big as serpents. Young Foakes used to go and set there with a line of evenings and catch 'em. He got struck into something, he never knew what it was, in Joyce's Head one night, an' that pulled so strong that nearly pulled him in. Broke his line, an' he said he wasn't sorry, neither. That scared him."

We had no eel nets, but he and I got out the punt and rowed down one side of Pennyhole Fleet, beating the thick reeds with an oar to put ducks out—for they lie like stones in August—while Robert crouched in Salter's Hide on the point where the fleet divides into two channels, and Claude hid in a reed-bed half-way down. A few duck squattered out and were ignobly slain for the pot—three mallard and two teal. A very different bag and a vastly different way of shooting from the winter flights in snow and fog, when they would come in like bullets, a score at a time, and others hard on their heels.

Half-way down the fleet my oar struck something in the water. It rebounded like a heavy rubber band, struck the side of the punt with a crack like a stone, and swirled off into the weedy depths. An eel, caught sunning himself. Others shot through the beds of widgeon-weed as we rowed along. The fleet was alive with them. The water was green, and along the edges the black mud stunk to heaven. No wonder we saw few ducks. Three seasons of almost unparalleled drought had soured even this big fleet, and the birds had sought the reservoir.

At the head of the fleet we found a ram, sunk up to his neck, baa-ing pitifully. Claude hauled him out. Another half an hour and he would have been swallowed in the black mud. Clouds of flying ants made rowing a misery. A huge dragon-fly glowing with oriental colours drove into them like a destroyer, snapping them up by the dozen. Dragon-flies do the same to midges, which is why they deserve to live.

Later Robert and I went across the marsh by Tiffen's Fleet to bathe in Salcott Channel, while Fell sat on the sea-wall and smoked. Claude stalked the Tollesbury Saltings with deadly Gallic ferocity, in search of small waders.

It was a detached other-world feeling to swim, alone and naked, in that very salt water, for these creeks have the densest salinity on

the British coasts. The sun was hot and the sea glittered, flat. Terns dipped and screamed. Gulls passed on leisurely wings. Redshank fluted up the mud, and the cool water glittered from one's nose away to the empty vastness of the North Sea. It was still only nine in the morning "by God's time." People ashore were finishing their breakfasts, arriving at their offices, opening letters, or just thinking of getting up. We had seen already an uneventful day of unforgettable small things.

Two air-sea-rescue launches swished in oilily from sea. *Their* day's work had already been done out in the wide loneliness of the North Sea. I thought, as I lay and floated, of the poor young air-gunner who had come down off Waldegrave's Farm on Mersea the winter before. His rubber dinghy lay within twenty yards of the shore. His navigator swam ashore, walked miraculously through the minefield, unscathed, and went inland to a telephone. The air-gunner had a broken leg and could not swim. He sat there on a still sea, in the dawn sun, waiting for his rescuers. When they came, an hour later, the dinghy had gone. A set of the tide which runs there inshore had carried him out to sea. That night it snowed and blew. And the North Sea is a bitter place in January. Three days later they found his body miles up the coast.

I thought of these and other tragedies which have been known in plenty up this coast as the rescue launches chugged softly in, as the sun beat down on the hot sea and the little waves slipped silkily in among the fat green stalks of samphire.

We came out of the salt water and sat on a patch of sea-asters and sea-lavender, yellow and purple, with the sun warming our backs, and watched a fox prowling up the tide-line on the opposite shore. He was perhaps a hundred and fifty yards away on the Feldy shore, a red-brown slinking shape, seeking what the tide might have left. A dead gull, a washed-up fish, a big mussel, or even a crab comes not amiss to these big marsh foxes. Presently he slipped over the wall and disappeared.

It was perhaps a quarter of an hour later that we saw the first flicker of the fire. It licked up above the sea-wall, at the foot of a clump of thorn-bushes—a hot red flame. Then it died down. A minute later, and another hot tongue flickered above the wall. There was little smoke. Then it suddenly crackled into a leaping line of flame which ran along the top of the sea-wall, licking up the grasses. A wide tawny flame with a black centre followed, six feet high. We sat up and gazed.

In two minutes the fire had spread from a tiny blaze to a line of flame which roared and crackled along the wall, driven by a smart wind. Beyond the sea-wall a wheat-stubble was crackling in a low, creeping line of sputtering flame. It reached the first wheat shock—they call them ' traves ' in Essex—leaped into full-throated flame, and, almost as quick as an exclamation, another shock, and another, and yet another. A long line of them was ablaze. The tide of fire was now a hundred yards wide. It roared on, dancing, crackling, leaping in a fiery exultation. Smoke billowed over the marshes in a blue-black haze. A hot mirage of trees and wheat-sheaves danced through it. The background became a hazy, reddish purple shot with darker plumes of rolling smoke and fierce red tongues. In the foreground the clear flames roared and crackled, tawny and black, red and pink, an inferno of fire and destruction in the sun. Hundreds of pounds worth of fresh harvested wheat was going up in flames. It was a beautiful, a terrifying, and a scandalizing sight.

" Reminds me of when the Malagashes set fire to the jungle in Madagascar," said Robert. " They blamed it on our shells, but they really did it themselves to get the ashes into the soil."

" That'll run on to the Strood and sweep a thousand acres with this wind behind it," said Fell.

" More War Agricultural farming methods," said I bitterly. Somehow, whenever any particularly foolish or extravagant mistake is perpetrated the natural reaction is to blame that cocksure body of self-satisfied wiseacres and their presumptuous minions. They farmed hundreds of acres on the opposite shore and had just erected a hideous red-and-white tractor-house in the distance at a high cost in spite of the fact that two long-empty, large houses with barns stood within a hundred yards of it. I hoped devoutly that the flames would get it.

The fire burned on, far into the distance. Presently the fox came sneaking back along the seaward side of the wall. The fire had caught him somewhere out on the marsh, but he had been wise.

IX. YEOMEN OF THE TIDE-LINE

On Oysters and Oyster-men—Oyster Cultivation and Costs—A Two-thousand-year-old Trade—George Stoker, Heir of the Romans—The Tale of a Whale: How It ferreted out a Village and blew up Nine Bullocks

How happy is he born and taught
That serveth not another's will,
Whose armour is his honest thought,
And simple truth his utmost skill!
SIR HENRY WOTTON

THE PALE NOVEMBER SUN SPILLED FLATLY AS CHAMPAGNE ACROSS a mile of sea and shining mud-flats. A smack rode lonely at anchor, a cardboard ship on a mother-of-pearl tide. Grey on the tide-edge, a duck-punt lay, low and slim. It was cold, lonely, and lovely, that sea-creek which two thousand years ago saw the Roman dredge for oysters beneath the banked oars of triremes, and a thousand years later saw the longships of Hasting the Dane ride the tide, when all this isle of Mersea was a Viking nest and palisaded stronghold.

The same tides, the same cold November wind over the same flat marshes, the same cry of curlew and clutter of waves beneath a wooden ship's forefoot; the same, always and for ever, on these mud-flats and sea-saltings, where man has wrought no change and the wise eyes of Time are not dimmed by his meddlings.

And almost, I thought, the same bent, patient, sea-booted figure dabbling with a strangely Roman tool of wood and iron and rope in the same oyster-pit which a man of Carausius might almost have dug those long two thousand years ago, when this isle of Meresaia was queen of the Essex seas, a place of special favour to the captains and centurions, an isle of villas with a white and gleaming pharos, a place of healing winds where the wounded legionary might recover and the Captain of the Eagles could eat oysters. For this isle is, perhaps, the most ancient home of the cultivated oyster in all Britain. And they are still high among the best in the world, these Mersea natives.

The bent figure by the cold tide-edge was no Roman. He shaded an eye, waved a hand—an old friend whose back, when I saw it first, twenty-five years ago, was straight and strong.

George Stoker is a patriarch among that hardy, cheerful, dauntless race of 'Nature's gentlemen,' the Mersea oystermen. Seventy-six and part-crippled by a motor smash, he spends every day, sun or rain, wind or snow, on the muds or in the pits or afloat, often in bitter weather which would put a city-bred man straight under the sod.

His kingdom is the unseen bed of the sea-channel and the mud and sea-lavender acres of Cob Island, an island awash at high tide, a curlew-haunted quagmire at low water. No house sits on its sodden acres. The winter gales sweep it, and the spring tides curdle its slimy shores. Crabs are its visible landsmen and wildfowl its wandering visitors. It is grey, cold, and clammy. George gave a thousand pounds for it.

And he gave several more substantial hundreds for an unseen area of sea-channel bed, a dim, submarine lordship of mud and gravel and shells, a place of sidling crabs and arrowy eels. And of oysters.

George earned that money in a hard way by long and bitter toil in the cold alleys of the sea. He lives, as Mersea men have lived for uncounted centuries, "by guess and by God," by sea-skill and weather-wisdom—a natural man and a wise one.

As you come down the coast road at Mersea you see the panorama of the sea and the shining creeks that run like fingers of a man's hand into the grey-green prairies of the endless marshes. And you see on the tide-edge shining square pools, wooden-sided, very neat, some full of water, some empty and clean.

By the coast road-side stand wooden huts and sheds. One or two are on stout floating rafts that bob and ride on the rising tides and toss heavily in the storms. These are the oystermen's 'offices' —places where tools are stored, oilskins hung up, customers talked with, and pipes lit when rain squalls smoke across the seething sea.

But the real work is not done in them. That goes on in the open air, up the windy channel, and on the mud, in the heat and bitter cold, wet-hand work and bent-backbone work.

The oyster is a hard master, a chancy gamble, a capricious mistress, the sport of all weathers, mother of a million children—a male one year and a female the next—a mother of pearls, and a child of mud; almost the lowest form of marine life, but the prize of men. It takes five years to grow, costs five years of labour and love, dies by the hundred thousand, needs as much care almost as a baby, is worth eightpence to the oysterman, and costs you one and sixpence to swallow in a second.

"Yes, I paid a thousand pounds for that old Cob Island when Willoughby John Bean, the Lord o' the Manor, sold up half the island and all the foreshore and for ever of lords' rights," said George. "A thousand pound, earned hard at sea. And the oysters never earned me a penny for five years. So I had to go back to sea for a livin'! Chancy things. Always a gamble."

We talked—old George and young George and that handsome Viking, Algar Mussett—of oysters. For do you know, or if you know do you pause to consider, when you swallow best natives at eighteen shillings a dozen, that the oyster is 'farmed' by many men of small capital but great manly worth, on the coasts? They are yeomen of the sea, these fishermen-owners of patches of mud and pools on beaches, where the oyster is their crop and wind and weather their only masters.

An average oyster lays about a million young or 'spat,' most of which meet an ugly end in the sea. Those that survive are washed along—tiny things so small that thousands could sit on a threepenny bit—looking for a bit of hard shell or rock on which to live their uneventful lives. Not so uneventful, in fact, for though the oyster starts life as a perfect little man he changes to a perfect woman, has his or her million children, with no love nonsense either, and then changes back to a male. A Hollywood film star's 'romances' are chicken-feed for simplicity in comparison.

The oysterman provides the necessary 'laying,' whereon the spat may rest and grow fat. A stretch of hard, clean bottom, preferably gravel or firm mud, on which a barge-load or more of old oyster-shells is shovelled down, forms the 'laying,' which is usually about one hundred and twenty yards long by seventy to eighty yards wide. It takes five years' hard work to make one and get it in production. Then it is worth about £300.

First the mud-bottom of the creek is raked clear of all rocks, wreckage, old anchors, old iron, or other debris, and harrowed free of all weeds. Then a barge-load of shells is emptied carefully over it and raked flat. This is called 'culching,' and it takes from eighty to a hundred tons of shells to do it properly. After that you hope that the spat will come along and take up residence. Once they have 'settled in,' it takes another four or five years before the oyster is fit to eat. Oysters go on growing up to nine or ten years, by which time they are about six inches long and really big.

Mersea has about twenty-five layings, employing about fifty people. Each laying represents about £400 to £500 in capital and

unlimited hard work. All are privately owned by fishing families, many of whom have been on the island for anything from two hundred to a thousand years. Some, I swear, have Danish blood. You see it in blue eyes and golden hair, in the fine open lines of countenance and limbs, in the natural grace of manner which is the legacy of the sea. Others, like the Mussetts, surely de Mussetts originally, came over with the best of the Huguenots after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes had set all France running with blood two hundred years ago. And some, like old Zebedee Milgate's ancestors, were Bretons from the rocky bays, where France listens to the Atlantic roar. Others, like 'Admiral' Wyatt's forbears two hundred years ago, were South Country men whose ancestors fought the Armada. An island, in short, full of native aristocrats and good sea-blood. And the oyster is oldest of them all.

The oyster's life is full of enemies. The four worst are the starfish, or five fingers, which strangles it, the slipper limpet, which sits on it and sucks it out of its shell, the tingle, which bores a hole in it, and the stockbroker who eats it with Chablis, lemon, and "brownbren'butter." The stockbroker is deadliest of the four, but the others eat without paying.

Portuguese oysters, which are large, fat, coarse in flavour, and inordinately repulsive in appearance, grow to twice or thrice the size of the native, and are fit only for frying, soup, stewing, putting in puddings, and throwing to the cat.

Before the war millions were brought each year from Portugal and dumped in our unoffending seas off Mersea and elsewhere. Since the war the imports have been mostly dead.

"I lost four hundred and sixty pounds in one year on 'em," said George, "and two hundred and sixty last year. No fortunes for us chaps in oysters! Usually only a quarter of the Ports that come in are any good."

So we went back to the demure and delicate native who ensnared the Roman heart.

"Weather," said George. "Weather'll play hell with oysters. We've had three bad seasons running, and as for that first winter o' the war, why, it froze so hard it nearly killed all the layings. You 'member! Icebergs in the Channel, eight and ten feet high. Like the Arctic it was. The ice grinding and crashing back'ards and forrards up the creeks very near scraped all the oysters off the bottom. What the ice didn't get the cold killed. Oysters don't

like cold—about sixty-eight degrees is just right for them if it comes at end o' June and up to mid-July. I reckon we've lost three-quarters of all the oysters in the Mersea waters and the Colne, including the Pyefleet, since the war began—just through bad weather.

" Starfish are another curse. Five-fingers we call 'em. They'll get their fingers round an oyster and suck it out. As for the limpet, I never saw one in these waters till about twenty-five year ago. When I got my first one I took it to the oyster jurymen on the marsh. They were elected each year to look after the interests of oystermen. Well, they didn't know what it was, either.

" People kept 'em for curios in those days! They say they came from America when the American blue-point oyster was brought over. Anyway, they've cost some millions in lost oyster-beds and doubled our labour. But we're getting 'em under. Drudgin' 'em up and throwing 'em on the marsh, we've lessened 'em a lot. Limpets do most of the damage by poisoning the oyster-lays and causing a lot of ' slush ' mud.

" Tingles! Damn 'em! They were brought by the birds, I reckon. Increased a lot in the last few years. They bore a hole in the oyster and kill it.

" And as for them old five-fingers, well, you've seen 'em often enough for yourself. If they get on an oyster-bed they'll kill every one. Not one left! There's a big bed of five-fingers off the Buxey Beacon and another one off Jaywick, below Clacton. They ruin mussel-beds as well."

To cap this tale of woe came all the damage caused by dumping T.N.T. in the sea at the end of the last war. It poisoned everything, including fish, which, when caught, putrified within a few hours.

I looked at a dredge, the tool which lifts the oysters off the layings so that they can be sorted and the larger ones transferred to the pits to fatten and be handy for market demands. The dredge has a heavy iron frame with a wire-mesh bottom called the ' rigging.' This, with a rope net, forms the bag into which the oysters are scooped off the bottom and brought to the surface. The whole thing is about two feet six inches wide at the bottom and about three feet six inches long, and weighs eighteen pounds.

" Looks simple and fit for the job, George," says I. " Who invented it ? "

" One o' them old Romans that was about here on Mersea years ago," said George casually, as though Carausius had skippered a

smack and drunk his pint at Mrs Hone's eclectic club for men of the sea only yesterday. "Yes, yes. An old Roman fashioned it, and we haven't changed it. It's still sound after two thousand years."

And that, I think, is the true note of Mersea men and their unchanging values.

"Well," says I, "I must be getting up to Mrs Hone's, so if you can get Algar to bring up a couple of dozen I'll have 'em for lunch."

"Har! An' a nice young roast widgeon arterwards, an' you 'ouldn't change places with the King o' England! They don't get grub like Mersea grub up in that Old London, I reckon. Get Ted Milgate to open 'em for ye. He's the head man at openin' 'em—sixty a minute when he gets goin'. Reckon they ain't got a man in those London oyster-bars can come nigh o' that!

"Nor nigh of a lot of other sound things," says I.

"Har! Jesso'. An' dew ye git young Ted to tell ye of when he ketched a whale off here a year or tew agoo—time ye was laid up—an' nearly pizened the lot on us!"

Now Ted, whom I presently encountered in Mrs Hone's, where you may meet any one from a rear-admiral to a winkler, is long-bodied and blue-jerseyed, with a lined face and an ingenuous eye which hides a guileful nature. He might be anything between thirty and forty, but North Sea winds and winter spindrift have graven their watermarks in his hands and face.

His grandfather was a Breton from Saint-Malo, which surprises no one on those windy levels of sea-marsh and shimmering flats which are my second home, for we have not only Mussetts, that noble clan of great yacht-shippers and smacksmen, fowlers and one-time smugglers, but also D'Wits, who came over with the Dutch or the Jutes and are dark-eyed and quick-moving to this day, and, for that matter, many another seagoing family whose blood has run with all the sliding tides of northern seas and Biscayan tide-rips.

Not that I knew anything of Ted's ancient Breton blood from that strange land of Celtic twilight and haunted standing stones until old Zebedee, his father, died. One never expected Zeb to die. He had sat, a small wizened figure with a sharply pointed white Captain Kettle beard and piercing blue eyes, beneath his peaked mariner's cap, in the bar window of the Victory, year by year, smoking his pipe and gazing fixedly out over the shining creeks and mud-flats to the cloud-arched vastness of the North Sea.

Zeb, one would have said, would go on for ever. Then one day

he died. Seventy-nine, and in due course he was buried, and Ted opened his wooden box. A Victorian shilling, beaten into a ring which is now on Ted's middle finger, a brass tobacco-box, an old silver watch, a boatswain's whistle, his master mariner's certificate, some money, two club books, and the family papers. They told the story of the Breton ancestors.

But they did not tell the story of Zeb's part in the famous sea-fight off the Naas End, when a Tollesbury smack and a Mersea smack, both oystermen, ran alongside a big forty-six-ton marauding Burnham smack, boarded her, beat up her crew with hand-spikes and fists, and threw her cargo overboard and her dredges after it. It was a great fight, the shouting and the fisticuffs, the oaths and black eyes, on the slippery deck in the clear sea-sunlight, with the smacks grinding and cracking together on the swirling tide, their sails flapping and burgees dancing. In the end the Burnhamers, bloody-nosed and beaten, hauled up their anchor, set sail, and squared away down by the Bachelor's Spit and the Buxey Sand for home, defeated men.

But that was not the end of it, not by a bagful of winkles. The case came up in the High Courts of Justice away up in London, and old Zeb, with two bloody wounds on his bandaged head, was one of a motley crew of Mersea men and Tollesbury chaps who stood, caged but incorrigible, in the dock on a charge of piracy on the high seas—the last trial for piracy in England. They were convicted, but remain innocent in the eyes of all right-thinking men to this day.

"Ye see, it was like this here," said Ted, settling himself on a stool and laying his gun carefully in the corner. He had been on a fox-shoot over six square miles of cattle-marsh where the assorted populace of three villages had blazed B.B. and S.S.G. in all directions from muzzle-loaders. Five foxes had died bloodily, and at least a dozen, "big as hosses," had escaped. Here in Mrs Hone's, with a quart pot between us, he relaxed, safe, but foxless.

"Yes, yes," said Ted, puffing cigarette-smoke at the stuffed heron. "Them Burnham chaps had bin a-drudgin' shingle and oyster culch off the Naas End for days. That belong to Mersea an' Tollesbury, all that culch—and Dad and some on 'em towd 'em so. But that warn't no go. They cum agin and drudged up tons o' shell. So away go tew o' our smacks, an' ran alongside 'em. There warn't no more than tew men showin' on deck on each smack, one at the hellum and one on the runners. Dad an' them was down below. They tumbled up, soon as the gunwales touched,

an' was aboard that Burnhamer like one o'clock, man o' war boardin' style! There was a rare old set-toal—arms an' legs a-'goin' and anything they could lay hands on. They fit like tom cats an' gied them Burnhamers suffin tew take home. There warn't one but got a black eye, an' some had tew.

"Rum going's on—but Mersea's a head place for rum 'uns and rum goes."

He gazed steadily out of the window at military motor-boats attempting to form fours. "Web-footed sojers," he muttered.

My mind went back to a night in Mrs Hone's, when that illustrious mistress of distinguished cookery had been asked if she could provide a whale steak.

"What was that about a whale you caught?"

"Same as a whale!"

"Yes—yours."

"Who towd ye I ketched a whale?"

"No one," I lied.

"'Cos there's bin a lot o' bloody lies about that there whale o' mine, an' the damn' thing nearly landed me in the clink. Ferreted out the whole village, that did."

He slewed his eyes round with sudden challenge.

"Don't you go an' put that in one of your books, now. 'Cos I know if we chaps spin you a yarn you don't half varnish it up!"

"I won't promise, Ted. Spit it out."

"Well, I was out in the motor-boat with the missus, trawlin', when up comes three bloody whales on the tide—dead. Reckon they'd been killed by a mine! I took a look, an' I sez to the missus, 'Never ketched a whale yet. I reckon I'll hev one of them b——s.'

"I runs me boat alongside the biggest one, gits aboard him—he drawed about three and a half foot and two foot freeboard—and stuck the fluke o' me anchor in his eye. I took a turn or two o' the cable round me sternpost an' towed him back to the foreshore. Rare big tide, so I got him up by the coast-road.

"Next mornin' they was all down a-garpin' at him. Hundreds o' folk. Sojers, orficers, flyin' chaps, an' sum of the Navy from Brightlingsea. All the locals too. I reckon I could ha' took a bucketful o' shillin's if I'd charged 'em. Har! I missed the money there.

"Tides took off next day, an' there he lay. Hot tew. Tha started it!"

"Did he stink?" I asked.

" Har! Suffin'! Bin dead a week or tew maybe. Wind went round to eastward, and they reckoned they smelt him in Colchester, ten mile off!

" Next day I was havin' my tea, settin' in the back place, when rap! rap! goes some one on the door.

" Away goo the missus! Back she cum:

" Policeman want you,' she say. ' Reckon it's about that whale o' yourn.'

" Away I goo. Copper stood there, big as a ship's figurehead.

" ' Name o' Milgate ? ' he say.

" ' Yis,' I say.

" ' You gotter a whale,' he say. ' Do you take the b—— away or I'll summons ye.'

" ' There's money in that there whale,' I say.

" ' *An'* a stink!' he say. ' Near enough knocked me off my bike comin' up the coast-road! Bus chaps say they 'on't bring the owd bus no nearer than the church. Goo you on—gid riddy on it! Do ye don't ye'll be up to court.'

" So I finishes me tea, an' away I goos to the Hard. Yew could smell that owd whale all oover the village by then! My heart, that did stink! Oily!

" I goos in the Victory to git some chaps to help me haul it down the beach, an' damn! they nearly chucked me out! Real savage! They'd had to shut all the doors and winders and then that ruined the beer.

" That cost me five quarts to git me pals—pals!—to git rollers under that whale and crank it down to the water.

" I stuck me anchor in it, an' away we goos. Towed it out a couple o' mile—lets go—and away back home. Hopes old Hitler gits it for his breakfuss in the mornin'.

" 'Bout fower next mornin', starlight, there comes a rare bangin' on the back door. I sticks out me snout an' hollers, ' Who's there ? '

" That was Mr Foster, that London gennelman what had taken a houseboat on the salts—ten guineas a week, tew.

" ' Yar name Milgate ? ' he hollers.

" ' Yis! '

" ' Yew gotter a whale ? '

" ' No, I haint, mate. I had one, but the b——'s gone to sea.'

" ' Well, he's come back agin, and he's nearly stove in my houseboat. Do you come an' haul it orf, or I'll County Court you! '

"Away I goos. Bright moon. Big tide, whale a-bumping up agin his boat. Stink! That'd ferreted him and his missus out orlright! They had to git up off to the pub in their pyjamas.

"Well, I gits out me motor-boat an' I tows that damn whale three mile out to sea—an' you don't git no petrol allowance for towin' whales about these days.

"Tew days later I was settin' in me back place tea-time, with a nice plate o' winkles and the vinegar, when rap! rap! rap!

"Away goo the missus. Back she come.

"'Chap want you,' she say, 'bout that whale o' yourn.'

"'Tell him I ain't home, an' I hain't got no whale,' I sez.

"'Thass the police inspector from Colchester,' she say. Away I goos. There stood the copper.

"'Yar name Milgate?' he say.

"'Yis, mate!'

"'Yew gotter a whale?'

"'No, mate. I had a whale time or tew, but the b——'s gone to sea!'

"'Har! Well—he've come beck and blowed up nine bullicks!'

"'How's that?'

"'Come ashore down at East on a big tide s'mornin',' he say 'Sailed in over the minefield, went clean through the barbed wire, and landed up in Mr Smith's medder. Soon as the tide dropped nine o' his bullicks git through the wire and was blowed up. Yer whale done it, and yew gotter piy!'

"'Piy! I 'on't piy, not if I goo ter jile,' I sez. 'I never bred the damn whale. I never took out a licence for it, and that ain't got no collar on with my name on. I've took that out to sea twice, an' what that do now ain't no consarn of mine. Do you git the sojers on the job,' I sez, 'there's for ever on 'em about wi' nothin' to do!'

"So away he goos, and they gits some sojers and blows that there whale up wi' dynamite and burns the b—— down wi' lime, an' that were the end o' he.

"That done me wi' ketchin' o' whales!"

X. THE KINGDOM OF NORFOLK

Some Great Norfolk Farmers—Harry Neave of Catfield and Myrus Sutton of Halvergate Hall—The Reclamation of the Waxham Marshes—Horsey Hall and Mere and the Great Flood—Burnley Hall and the Old West Somerton Duck-decoy—Abner Harvey, the Dog-trainer—The Farm Labourer who bought a Prime Minister's Estate—A Man who buys Four Hundred Thousand Pounds' Worth of Irish Bullocks a Year—And the Adventure of a Golden-headed Hen—With a Few Words on Lord William Percy's Bitterns

> Norfolk, under a wise and just government, can have nothing to ask more than Providence and the industry of man have given.
>
> WILLIAM COBBETT, *Rural Rides*

THE NEXT DAY I WENT UP TO FLEET STREET TO CONSULT WITH my old friend Arthur Christiansen, the editor of the *Daily Express*, on the sins and waste of War Agricultural Committees. And there I saw a most remarkable sight. A great fat female in khaki, martially girt about with a leather belt, and in a peaked cap, pirouetted out of a taxi on ridiculous, peg-top legs, clad in the shimmeriest of silk stockings and high-heeled shoes. She bolted like a bloated butterfly into Reuter's. I had one glimpse of a raddled and predatory face, reminding one of those awful creatures who, in pre-war days, infested the Ritz Bar and other places where people prey. This was an American war correspondent.

Now, this un-warlike apparition set me thinking about the way in which Americans have behaved in the English countryside, and the manner in which the English country people reacted to them. It is a thorny subject, but it will do no harm to future relations between us to speak the truth. And the truth is that the Americans started with a wide-open gift of goodwill towards them and a few, a noticeable few, did their best to ruin it—and largely succeeded in this.

In the beginning the house and the inn, the hall and the cottage, the board and the glass, were theirs for the asking. Inability to take malt liquor well, and a hoggish thirst for raw whisky, which they take worse, were the first noticeable setbacks. Women-chasing, particularly little girls, was the next, and by far the worst. The follies of grown women are their own affair, but when girls of thirteen and fourteen were compromised the British heart closed

right up. Maybe the girls were to blame. Every woman, they say, is a harlot at heart, and every man a rake, but it is the height of bad taste to take the first for granted, and to behave as the second towards half-fledged little girls.

The result was that in Colchester, Norwich, and Ipswich, to take three biggish towns, it soon became the fashion for men to drink up quickly and leave the bar of the inn when Americans came in, and for village women to tell their daughters " not to demean themselves " by being seen with them.

It will, I know, be argued that war-worn soldiers deserve licence, which is true. But these were not then war-worn. They had merely crossed the Atlantic, with three or four spare pairs of pants, and got a medal for doing it—unlike the merchant seaman, who merely found it a cold and boring job but all part of the day's work. In other words, they had not yet earned the right to cut loose—if that right ever exists with schoolgirls.

A working man in Wroxham said to me, " The little girls, no more than kids, in a family way about here is a downright shame. It ought to be a prison job for the men to blame—kids of fourteen and fifteen." The landlord of a famous old Tudor hotel in Essex said, a week later, " There are many of 'em I like, particularly the Air Force lads, but I'm not serving *any* in future if I can help it. They can keep their money and their swank and put both in the pockets of their fancy pants. I'm running a *quiet* house."

On the other hand, on Mersea Island one found that only the best came so far out, to eat, drink, and look at old houses and see a Romano-Danish isle. They were eager, decent fellows, genuinely interested in history and all its fascinating bypaths, brave men and modest. The rowdies and the ridiculous film hussars with olive-Latin faces and gigolo moustaches, slouching walk and corner-boy bravado, stayed in the towns.

The conclusion to which one was forced was that, whereas there is yet no truly distinctive American type (apart from the fleshy-jowled business man with his centrally heated grey complexion and iced-water liver), there are two distinctive types of the ordinary young man. The first, the Middle Westerners and Southerners—lean, brown, quiet, and earnest, sons of farmers and grandsons of settlers—are the salt of the earth, men to go with anywhere and hunt tigers by moonlight.

But the second, compounded of Central European, Latin, and Irish extraction—noisy, sloppy, unhealthy, flashy in dress, manners

and speech, ignorant almost to the point of downright illiteracy, aping so-called film stars (those epitomes of vulgar mediocrity), drinking indiscriminately, necking publicly, talking loudly, walking badly, ogling schoolgirls—these sex-crazy, unhealthy-looking youths, 'educated' by Hollywood trash and gangster novels are surely America's 'problem children,' her legacy from a too-eager admission of the sweepings from the slums of pre-1914 Europe.

However, the countryman soon learned to differentiate between the two types, and if, and when, some of those Ninth Air Force boys from the Middle West farms and the Southern plantations come to East Anglia again when war is over they would find a real and an unrestrained welcome.

That night I went up to Norwich, a city of recurring delight, and arrived just in time to see the sunset from Castle Hill—a smoky-red bonfire which died slowly above the spires and chiming bells, the tumbled red roofs and cathedral trees, the shining river and the grey castle of that most ancient and lovable of English cities. Small wonder that Norwich has nurtured great artists from Crome and Cotman to Borrow, who was an artist of words and, to-day, my ebullient, voluble, and gallant friend, Alfred Munnings, a man who has done a century's noble work in a lifetime for the best in British art. He has brought back true beauty and the loveliness of simplicity to an art world which before the war was sickening of a green canker of neo-nothingness and futuristic fatuity.

And in another, and a different way, another Norwich man, R. H. Mottram, the quiet, serious man who was once a bank clerk, has also done a great work for present-day English literature. I thought of him and our early days together with poor Rex Whistler, when *Our Mr Dormer*, that superb piece of quiet writing, was being born, and Whistler was illustrating the serial instalments which I was publishing. It is, in its eighteenth-century way, as arresting and memorable a book as *The Spanish Farm*, the best book written about the last war because it was the truest to things as we knew them in Flanders and threw up no false high-lights.

And so thinking on all the sturdy and pertinacious characters whom Norwich and Norfolk have nursed—for this is no county of standardized mediocrities—I went to the Maid's Head, which is still much as it was in Elizabethan days, with its mighty iron man-trap at the door to catch those whom it dislikes. There I met a man over a quart of beer—for Norfolk barley is still the best, and

so the beer deserves quart mugs—and we sat and talked of bitterns and bearded tits and wild grey geese and their unpredictable ways, and of the miraculous escape of this old house and that other medieval gem, The Stranger's Hall, from bombs, and finally of old Arthur Patterson—John Knowlittle to all Norfolk—the greatest gipsy naturalist since Thoreau, a writer of rare perception but with no style, a prowler of broads and marshes and of fish-quays and sandhills, a man who, with his cocky little Captain Kettle beard and peaked cap, looked more like a sea captain than a naturalist and yet was one of the greatest men I have met, and, among a lot of other things, one of Britain's most erudite marine biologists.

All of which is less than a proper tribute to one who began life running barefoot on the Yarmouth fish-quays and crowned it by being presented by the Lord-Lieutenant and assembled nabobs of his county with a purse of gold and an illuminated address to mark Norfolk's appreciation of his services to her literature.

Early next morning I went to see Jimmy Wright. Now, Jimmy Wright is the Secretary of the Norfolk Farmers' Union and ought to be in Parliament, because he knows what he is talking about, and a great many rural M.P.'s do not when it comes to farming.

The Norfolk branch of the Farmers' Union is different from most other county branches. It has more guts and go. It does not sit on its tail and bark. It pokes a stick of ginger under the tail of anyone who deserves it, including the somewhat self-righteous headquarters of that great union. So I expected to hear illuminating things.

"Bureaucrats," said Jimmy Wright from behind his spectacles. "The curse of farming and the curse of all else in business and life, if we don't look out. We must get rid of 'em!"

"Hear! Hear!" says I. "But I thought I had left all that sort of thing behind me. I thought you had a good War Agricultural Committee."

"So-so! Fair. They do a good job, but even they are not what we want. We want *no* Committees—just fair prices and no foreign imports of anything that we can grow ourselves. What do you think of rural M.P.'s?" He shot it at me like a bullet.

"Too many briefless young barristers with striped pants, and too many ambitious K.C.'s and retired business men," said I. "You want more farmers and landowners in the House if farming is to put its case and get a square deal for itself—and for the good of the country—after the war."

"Exactly. We don't want any M.P.'s for rural Norfolk who aren't farmers or directly connected with the land. There's a row coming, you see!"

I did. A month later the Norfolk Farmers' Union protested publicly against the proposed adoption of Colonel Sandeman Allen, an underwriter and M.P. for Birkenhead West, who was proposed for adoption as a Conservative candidate for a Norfolk constituency presumably because he had decided to live in the county. The principle is right. Other rural constituences should do the same. The time has gone when a farming seat can be used as a comfortable woolsack for any rich man whether landed or not. Otherwise farming will continue to be the Parliamentary Cinderella.

There were three men in East Norfolk whom I wanted to see, since they were masters of most of the farming arts and had made great names for themselves. I knew none of them, but their works were eloquent.

So the next morning I rang up the first of the trinity, Mr H. P. E. Neave, of Catfield. Now, Mr Neave is the son of a yeoman farmer and the grandson of a yeoman farmer with a seafaring great-grandsire who sailed in windjammers in Napoleon's day. That is the true Norfolk touch.

Grandfather Neave left £100,000 which he made out of shrewd cattle-dealing and sound farming, but when young Harry Neave came out of destroyers at the end of the last war he had no more than £1800 capital to call his own and a 186-acre farm in which to lose it. He lost it. The parliamentary predominance of industrialists and Socialists who agreed that cheap food must be brought in at any cost, saw to that.

There was, indeed, a winter when young Harry Neave could scarcely afford a new overcoat. So, he says, he raided every hedge and copse on his land, cut every male holly worth cutting, and sold the leaves and berries to the Christmas markets; the straight young sticks he sent to the whip-makers. In the summer he stripped the Virginia creeper off his house and sold the leaves, in suitable posies. After that he did a little shrewd cattle-dealing, and then, seeing a lot of optimistic townsmen and others rushing into chicken-farming, he designed, built, and proceeded to sell one of the best chicken-houses in the country.

It all started with a few odd bits of wood in a shed at the back of Bleak House Farm at Catfield, which is a straggling sort of village straddling a low ridge of exceedingly fertile land between Barton

Broad and Hickling Broad. You can lie under the thatch in Catfield any starry night of winter and hear the great teams of duck go over, and thrill to the wild music of grey geese on flight.

To-day the Neave workshops at Catfield cover several acres. They employ nine hundred men. They built and housed every searchlight site between the Thames and the Wash. They have built endless Bailey bridges for Burma and France and thousands of huts for the Army and Air Force. And on top of these manifold works Neave farms two thousand acres of that rich Catfield land and other lands at Eccles and Happisbro', by the bleak sea-edge, at Lessingham, where the monks of the Abbey of Bec had their cell nine hundred years ago, at Waxham, behind the blue-grey old hall of the Wodehouses which crouches behind its pinnacled walls beneath the hairy sandhills of the sea, and at Palling, where the longshore fishermen still set out their long lines as their forbears did three hundred years ago, and herrings are kippered over smoked oaken billets in tiny tarred huts amid the sand dunes.

They are wonderful farms, well drained and well roaded, with concrete yards and spotless cowsheds, with electric light in the cottages and contented faces on the land. There are 400 milking cows on those farms. That is a considerable achievement when you consider that those cows are fed for more than nine months of the year on by-products of the farm—such as beet-tops, beet-pulp, kale—and on skirt-land, and marsh grazings. They produce tons of good farmyard muck—the sheet anchor of sensible farming, despite the theories of the 'scientific' pundits, most of whom neither take the risks of the farmer nor get their living by producing food. That is why Neave's standard of farming and the productivity of his land are second to none in Norfolk.

So I rang him up at half-past eight one morning, told him my name, and said I should like to look over his farms.

"The very man I wanted!" said an engagingly enthusiastic voice at the other end. "I want to talk to you. Got your gun with you? Good. I'll send a car at once. We're shooting partridges to-day. Be ready in twenty minutes' time."

"A go-getter," thinks I, "and a young-minded one, too. I wonder what he looks like."

The answer was a quick, sturdy young man of forty-five who looked less like a farmer than most farmers, although in these days of mackintoshed Lowland Scots and their awful standardization of trilby hats, badly cut town clothes, and two-hundred-pound motor-

cars it is difficult to tell a farmer when you meet one. Most of the young ones have abandoned the melton cloths and tweeds, the good breeches and drab buskins of their fathers for a get-up which looks like a cross between the attire of a grocer and that of a commercial traveller.

Harry Neave has the quick movements, staccato walk, and decisive mind of a man of action. I stayed that week-end with him.

On the Sunday morning of my visit to Lessingham Manor, his fifteenth-century house in its thin belt of firs on the edge of the Hundred Stream within smell of the sea, the thatched roof caught fire. The house was burned to the ground, in the teeth of a gale, within forty minutes.

"Ah!" said Johnson, the works manager, as the flames roared red and yellow in the sunlit morning, and keepers, cowmen, bailiffs, tractor-drivers, and the master laboured out with household goods. "That won't daunt him. He'll have a new house up in no time. You see! Our guv'nor's motto is that he loves bloody trouble, 'cos he have the fun o' gettin' out of it. You see!"

I did see. Within a year or so of that unhappily apt Fifth of November, on the ruins of Old Lessingham Manor, where once stood a prior's cell of the Abbey of Bec, there was to arise a stout-walled, flint-faced cottage, rebuilt in a mellow Norfolk dignity from the stones of old priory ruins, the knapped flints of old barns, and the timbers of stranded ships, and roofed with pantiles from derelict cartsheds. It was a notable work, planned within a week of the fire by that sympathetic architect, Mr A. S. G. Butler, who wears the mantle of Lutyens. It was built by farm labour in off-moments.

I could easily, and with praise, write a book about the Neave farms and the men who work on them. There are marshmen who wear gold earrings and work in dykes which their forbears dug two hundred years ago. There are pippin-faced and guileful old seamen who plough and drain the windy fields above the sea which saw their youthful battlings. There are bailiffs like Gaff, ruddy-faced and square, with a West Norfolk burr, or Kathleen Adcock, who is red-faced and humorous-eyed and ageless and tireless. She acts as liaison between nine farms and the main office, yet says she would rather be back among the cows.

It would be easy to tell the story of how Neave reclaimed the trackless marshes of Waxham, so wild that there were even found the skeletons of five dead, forgotten men in those dim reed-beds;

but he has told the whole tale, and much more beside, in his book, *Muck and Mechanization*, which is gospel of the faith embodied in its title. All I will say, therefore, is that he took and shook and drained and ploughed and reseeded those primitive marshes at a cost *less than one-third* below the costs of the reclamation of similar land by the War Agricultural Committees in near-by counties. But such deeds by private individuals naturally seldom receive either publicity or merit in these days when the Ministry of Agriculture alone maintains over sixty hired writers to publicize its good deeds and every little War Agricultural Committee has a journalistic yes-man to tell the public of wonders it has achieved—all the facts except the costs, the evictions, the suicides, and the heartbreaks.

The Neave farms are all deep ploughed, some as deep as fourteen inches, mechanized to the hilt, mucked by the ton, well-drained, and all in big fields. Neave has saved as much as one acre in ten by bulldozing hedges, filling in ditches, breaking up old farm roads, and throwing the lot into one field. Indeed, one farm at Eccles of eighty-six acres which was formerly in five or six fields with ditches, hedges, farm roads, and a tank-trap, all taking up space, was thrown into *one field* and thereby added six or eight acres to its cultivable area.

He uses probably more artificial manures and fertilizers than any other farmer in East Norfolk, but he also uses more farmyard muck than I have seen used elsewhere in the same area. It is, indeed, an article of faith with him: a sort of fiery gospel that muck and good cultivation, mechanization and concrete should go hand in hand as the props and pillars of good farming. He has grown as much as seventeen sacks of wheat to the acre—not once, but often. His roots are clean and full, his furrows straight and empty of standing water, his ditches clean-bottomed, his stockyards concreted and his cowsheds and dairies models of spotless cleanliness. There are pheasants in his woods, and ducks and great hares with the fishing herons and springing snipe on his marshes. But, above all, there are smiling faces in the cottages and good pay-packets to take home on Fridays.

There are pleasant memories of that autumn and white winter at Catfield, when I roosted like a hedgerow moorhen on the edge of Hickling Broad and thence foraged out over half England and even into mid-Wales for a few weeks among the ravens and the buzzards, the hill sheep and the polecats at Clochfaen Hall, under the shoulder

of Plynlimon, where the young Wye ran, bitter-cold and flecked with swirling ice.

Memories of night-flighting for duck in barrels by the flight-pond near Waxham Bridge, where once lived, at the lonely farm, Oliver G. Ready, who wrote that enchanted book, *Life and Sport on the Norfolk Broads in the Golden Days*. Nights when the North Sea boomed hollowly in the dusk, herons came hoarsely under the stars, a golden plover whistled his thin melancholy, and widgeon whimpered over. Then came the mallard—big black forms shooting suddenly out of the dusk, rocketing overhead or seeming suddenly to hang in the wind, fanned wings extended, until the shot cut them down with a splash and a dozen others uprose from flooded meadow and shallow splash.

There was a solitary day by myself walking the green marshes after hares and wading through the tall brown reeds on Hickling Wall, where the soil is black and peaty and the otter-slides show on the dyke-side and the hares lie hid in jungles that would hide a tiger. At the far end down by old Brograve Mill, which Benjamin Brograve built in 1771, I saw a marsh harrier leave the mill and beat and glide, beat and glide, far over the reeds of Braydon Marsh, that stronghold of otters and bitterns, to the cold waters of Horsey Mere.

There was another day at Horsey Hall, that lonely house in its tall island of trees which lie like a thundercloud on the bosom of miles of bare and windy marshes. Those wide levels run from Horsey Mere to Martham Broad, from Potter Heigham and beyond to the thin sandhills of Horsey Gap, where the sea thunders.

And there lives Major Anthony Buxton, that good naturalist and sensitive artist, who has made of Horsey a paradise and a sanctuary for wildfowl and otters, for rare falcons and harriers, and for all the hidden, shy creatures who make a marsh a place of infinite delight.

He showed me sketches of an otter's slide—a sort of joyful tobogganning in snow. They had slid down a dyke-side on to a frozen dyke, turned on their backs, slid backs down along the ice, turned over again, and scrambled out. A schoolboy game. He had traced it in the snow and put it into most delicate sketches.

We lunched in the tall white house behind the lonely church, in its shaggy garden among the trees. It is full of good heads of Carpathian and Scots stags. And after lunch we walked down, across level grass marshes, to Horsey Mere. It was here, a hundred years ago, that Girdlestone once saw seven sea-eagles hovering over

the warrens in one day, and it would never surprise me to see a sea-eagle there any day of autumn or winter now. The osprey comes to fish, lord-like, in that lonely mere set in its aureole of gold-brown reeds, and the bittern breeds there, gnomishly, sometimes within view of the bank.

" Sam Hoare [1] sat in that hide there one day and saw a purple gallinule feed within fifteen feet of him," said my host casually, as though a purple gallinule was a light matter. " It rose and flew round him once or twice, but he had it in full view for some twenty minutes or more. It was here for weeks—hope it comes again."

Rare birds are safe at Horsey. Not only are they safe, but they are under the eye of a squire who knows each and every one and loves them. That sort of personal sanctuary is worth ten National Trust areas, overrun by priggish dons or that peculiarly detestable type of prying ' bird-lover ' which marches about, slung round with camera, field-glasses, and sandwich-box, and scares every bird and beast for miles. Luckily these bird-scarers are not seen in autumn or winter. The days are too cold and their nights are given to knitting or the gathering of museum knowledge.

" We had a couple of collectors here once," said Major Buxton, telepathically apropos of my thoughts. " They were in the tall reeds a mile away when we first spotted them. But the keeper and I did a little stalking and got one man as he was kneeling down at a nest. He didn't know what was happening till the keeper's right hand was over his eyes and the other one on his shoulder. The other man got away, but, by using the telephone, we had him stopped and searched at Liverpool Street Station—with the eggs on him! Neither of those Midland gentlemen has paid us a visit since! "

He planted my wife and I in a reed-bed and loped off, with a deerstalker's long stride, away along the snowy bank which wound through the reeds, his cap bobbing above their rimy tassels, his telescope case hanging on his shoulders. We waited.

Presently a party of widgeon swept past, low over the water. Golden-eye flickered up on quick, cutting wings, and swans—seven of them—lifted in white majesty, dim in the opal half-light of snow-mist, and went out to sea. Were they wild whoopers or tame mutes ? It was impossible to say. Either was possible on that enchanted mere, which lies within whisper of the sea and smell of the tamer Broads.

[1] Now Lord Templewood, war-time Ambassador to Spain.

A snipe "sca-aped" over, and tufted duck got up and went on stubby wings far over the reedy wilderness of Braydon Marsh, which is no marsh at all really, but a dense jungle of a hundred and seventy acres of reeds. Once, long centuries ago, it was part of the Mere, and now is a fastness of otters, bitterns, bearded tits, short-eared owls, and marsh harriers. It is part of the Horsey estate and safe from reclaimers and 'bird-lovers' alike.

There have been storks on Horsey more than once, a flamingo on occasion, and those lovely porcelain creatures, avocets, several times. Ruffs and reeves turn up more often than the official records would have you believe. The hen harrier beats the levels, and the osprey plunges in its lonely waters. We saw none of them that day, but we saw the beauty and the loneliness, the space and the changing lights of that rare place of reeds and waters and wide levels whose face has not changed much since old Robert Rising lived there eighty years or more ago and farmed its lands well, shot its birds, and, true to his Victorian custom, put as many as possible of them into glass cases. We may laugh at it to-day, but the Norfolk museums are the richer, and many a cottage home in and about Horsey has its stuffed merganser, or oyster-catcher, or cock pintail, in full dress as a proud ornament and, like enough, a stimulant to a boy's mind to go out and learn to watch rather than always to kill.

It was a night in February 1938 when the sea, pounding hollowly through wild, dark hours of shouting gales, broke in at Horsey Gap. Spumy-crested and maned with white, the salt waters poured in on this hollow land. The sandhills crumbled, and the ineffectual fascines of faggots put there by an impoverished local council were tossed away as sticks. The waters curdled in, and the roar of the sea, that eternal monotone of this shuddering coast, became a liquid lapping and gurgling, more insistent each minute.

Some one roused the squire. He ran down the lawn to find the salt water at his gate in the plantation belt. Half the road to the village was flooded, and, beyond, the long flat levels to Martham and Somerton were a glittering sea, wan and winking under the stars. The millman was fast asleep in his bed in the cottage by Horsey Mill. When he awoke and rushed out he was knee-deep in sea-water in his own garden.

By dawn fifteen thousand acres of Horsey, Martham, Somerton, Hickling, Waxham, and other parishes were under salt waters. Cattle were marooned on patches of higher ground. Sheep huddled on islets and had to be taken off by boat. On Waxham Marshes

two men in a punt, and with a gun, found 104 hares on a bare island and shot the lot. Snakes by the score, flooded out of their winter holes in the banks, writhed and squirmed until they died.

Fish from the broads and dykes—tons of them—floated belly upward, poisoned by the salt. Great pike which had haunted many an angler's dreams, slab-sided bream, gold-scaled rudd, grand fighting perch, and shoals of silvery roach all perished. It was luck and God's providence that no man or woman died.

For weeks Horsey—its church, hall, and village—was marooned. Men came and went by boat, and women waited indoors. In his house at Waxham Bridge, that gabled old house where Oliver Ready spent an enchanted boyhood and wrote his enduring book, my friend, Mr Youngs, that wise gardener and seeing naturalist, had the sea-water in his scullery, seeping up through the kitchen bricks, and halting only at the sitting-room threshold.

The millmen, those lonely men whose lives are lived far out on the misty levels, masters of wind and water, disciples of ancient arts, were driven to the first floors of their mills, whence they looked out, as from lighthouses, on a shimmering sea where only gulls mewed and bewildered wild duck flew. It was a reincarnation of the Broadland as the Romans knew it when Garianonum was the lonely fort on its peninsula between sea and marsh, and half East Norfolk was a wild and ghostly place of deep bogs and shining waters and witch-candles moving by night.

We talked of it at tea, mourned the oaks and the elms which the waters had slain—for here a tall, grown tree is a treasured wonder—and marvelled at the solitary Turkish oak down towards the dyke, which had survived it, even though its roots had stood in the salt flood.

"The sea is under this land to-day," my host said surprisingly. "I'm certain of it. I took a spade and dug a spit of earth out of that cattle-marsh yonder by the hard road not long ago—and salt water welled up! A mile from the sea, too, I found sea-lavender growing in a dip in the middle of the same marsh. An island in the Mere has sunk a foot or more since the flood. Yes, I'm certain that the sea underlies this land to-day."

I went earlier that autumn to see another estate which lies on the sea-verge—Burnley Hall, at West Somerton, the property of an old friend, Sir Gerald Talbot.[1] Talbot got his knighthood at the end of the 1914-18 war when the liberated Greeks immediately

[1] Since dead and the estate has been sold.

began using their liberty as an excuse to butcher each other, an odd habit of Balkan peoples. It never fails to provide our own Pink Ineffectuals and political dwarfs with an excuse for blaming Britain when she attempts to restore law and order and save lives. Talbot arrived as the King's personal emissary just in time to save the life of Prince Andrew of Greece, who was due for trial on a flimsy pretext, following the shooting of seven ex-Cabinet Ministers who were not given even the decency of half an hour's time in which to prepare themselves for death.

After that it seemed to Talbot the fit and proper thing to retire to this old red house in its little park and walled gardens, among tall groves of pigeon-haunted trees, with the murmur of the North Sea across the marshes and wild duck waiting to be shot on Martham Broad. Burnley is a fascinating property of about fifteen hundred acres, a little smaller than Horsey, but with the same bleak grandeur of wide levels and tawny sandhills framing a private broad where anything might make its nest or pay a wandering winter visit.

Talbot was away, since the R.A.F. was in the house, but I robbed his peach-house, ate his figs, and walked round with Pateman, the keeper, an immense Yorkshireman living in a big flint cottage under a woodside.

There is a ruined and roofless church in a wood by the hall. An oak grows straight out of the chancel floor high above the walls. It was planted a hundred and twenty years ago by the grandfather of Dick Jettens, the gardener. " But we always tell the charabanc people," said he with a grin, " that they buried an old woman with a wooden leg in the church and that the tree grew out of her leg."

Tall groves of birch and alder, willow and ash, stood white and ghostly beyond the dead church in the living wood—the echoes of that grim winter flood seven years before. The dead wood of ghost trees melted into acres upon acres of brown and sighing reeds. We walked on a quaking path of old logs. Water glimmered among the reeds. Duck in twos and threes flew up. Then a rush of wings and much quacking, and twenty or thirty swept up off a pool not more than a score of yards across.

" The old decoy pond," said Pateman. " Sir Gerald have shot half a hundred ducks here at a flight before now, and the bittern have nested here more'n once. A rare good pool, an' quiet too."

But I was thinking not of Sir Gerald's half-hundred ducks on a winter's night when the sea smelt strong and groaned loud, not of the bitterns creeping, tawny breasted, through the secret reeds, but

of that day three hundred years ago when an old, unknown man, the first decoy man in all English history, dug this pond for the Wodehouses, who were lords of all these marsh levels from their great hall at Waxham and had lands that are now graveyards beneath the sea.

James the First was on the throne, holding his dilatory Court at Newmarket and coursing the hares over the great 'Fields' of Cheveley, Dullingham, and Fordham, when here, in this lonely Norfolk parish, the lord of the manor caused to be dug a duck-decoy, a new-fangled idea from Holland, brought, like enough, by one of the Dutch drainers whom the lords and squires of the fen-lands were employing to raise good acres from drowned bogs.

And I recollected that Old Skelton, that unlettered prince of all decoy men, had worked this pond for a season or two.

We walked on through the reeds and came out in a great sandy warren under the sandhills, with a wind-twisted wood of blown and stunted trees crouching under the hills like a congregation of witches. It looked the place for a peregrine or an eagle owl, a shiny black raven on huge wings, or any fantastic wanderer the sea-winds might bring.

"Tew owd brothers lived in a hut on this here warren, years ago," said Pateman, kicking a turf ridge, faint in the sand. "Here's where the owd house stood. Owd men in the village used to recollect 'em. They was the last of the owd 'coy men—tew brothers, name o' Skelton! They kep' a dickey an' cart an' used to go to Winterton once a fortnit for their grub an' stores. Couldn't read nor write an' never talked to no one. Reg'lar owd hermits. But they took cartloads o' ducks in the 'coy. Used to take 'em in ter market in the dickey an' cart. Thousands o' birds.

"One day one on 'em was tuk sick. Wouldn't have a doctor, though God knows it would ha' been a job to git a doctor to this outlandish part. Warn't no road then, and Horsey Hall was only reached by a track along these hills—no road across the marshes in them days.

"When the other brother got to Winterton a man says to him, 'How's your brother to-day?'

"'Fair!' says the owd man. 'Fair! He garp an' he garp, but he's fair. He's in his truckle bed wi' a tin of treacle alongside an' he keep lickin' at that. While he lick he live!'

"But," added Pateman sententiously, "he didn't lick long, pore owd chap. The churchyard got howd on him!"

We looked at a great bomb crater in the sand, full of water. "Rare good little flight-pond, that," said Pateman, with a grin. "They seem to like it. Sir Gerald's shot many a dozen duck on that of an evening."

Rabbits abound on these sea-warrens, where the curlew cry and the woodcock come in wing-weary from their North Sea voyagings. You could shoot a cartload in a day. Occasionally rare birds turn up and are not identified—such as the tall, long-legged brown bird seen a year or two ago and sounding, to me, most suspiciously like a great bustard. Anything can happen on this blunt shoulder of Eastern England which juts into the North Sea, into the migrational route of half the birds of Europe.

Burnley is a first-rate small shoot. Before the war fifteen hundred pheasants were shot in a year, and an average good day was a hundred brace of pheasants, forty to sixty woodcock—a remarkable average—a hundred rabbits, and fifty hares with snipe and plover. As for duck, Gerald Talbot has shot sixty-four and seventy-eight in a night, and a hundred could no doubt be got at a flight.

In a thicket of blackthorn and blackberries we found a little five-foot, bright-eyed man with a face of leather, gold rings in his ears, a sailor's blue guernsey, and a peaked cap, his basket full of blackberries, his foot as light as air. We passed the seal of the day, and the little sparrow-eyed man nipped nimbly down the track like a weasel on springs.

"That owd pup," said Pateman slowly, "that owd pup is ninety-four. He'll never die. I don't know his name, but he's an owd sailorman, an' he comes from Winterton, an' if he took a sackful o' rabbits I'd never have him up afore Sir Gerald. Tell you why, sir. He loves birds. He'll set in these old bushes for hours an' smoke his owd clay pipe an' watch 'em. I like a man like that, an' I like a wild owd place like this. They seem to go together, don't they?"

And as I rode back, an hour later, along that high ridge of arable which looks down on Martham Broad, shining in its reeds, and across all the smoky levels of marsh and mere to the far grey cloud which was the tall trees about Horsey Hall, I thought of old Thain, that other marshman with the misspelt but noble Danish name, brewing his evening tea in that little low, thatched house which crouches by the edge of Martham Broad. His eel-spears would be resting against the thatch where the starlings whistled. His eel-nets would be drying on the apple-tree, his punt half-hid in the reeds,

his ducks quacking in the dyke, his ferrets chittering at the wire in their hutches. Who knows that the far ancestor of that wise and cunning old broadsman was not in verity a Thane, a lordly Dane who left his blood and his mark on this wild sea-land? Truly you must go to wild places and open skies to breed character and lasting blood. The city breeds ferret-cunning.

I thought, too, of old Abner Harvey who lived a hermit's life, a wiry, fierce little man, in a turf cabin at the broad's end of that green lane which they call Catfield Common since it was, and still is, an old lane running through bits of common land down to a dyke which winds through dense reed-beds and sallows into Hickling Broad. The walls, which still stand, roofless and windowless, are a foot and a half thick, of plain mud, bound together with straw and reeds. The house was tarred outside and whitewashed within, well windowed, and with beamed ceilings, good doors, and a thatched roof. Such a house is warm in winter and cool in summer, watertight, and windproof. It will last a hundred and fifty years and cost a tittle of the tin shacks and prefabricated sardine-tins which this gadget-crazy generation of bureaucrats insists on as a bare basis of living. They forget that iron is hot in summer, cold in winter, deafening in rain and storm, rusts in the wet, and sweats in the moist airs of England. They scorn the simple sense of forbears who lived longer and waxed mightier.

I thought of my own lath-and-plaster little manor house in the Fens, still gracious, warm, and welcoming after five hundred years of life, and I thought too of that other mud-and-tar-and-thatch cabin in Catfield Common Lane, where a mother reared a family of thirteen boys. Not one is under six feet, and eleven of them are London policemen, fit and able to tuck a Londoner under each arm and take him home for breakfast.

They are of the same breed as old Abner, who dealt in dogs for a living and fought for his beer.

He would leave his mud-walled house with its roof of thatch at the end of the dyke, where the mallard spattered in the moonlight and reed-warblers sang in the sun, and go to Norwich Market. There, on the hill in that gay and coloured market, where men sell everything from kippers to bibles, boots and roses, rabbits and bright scarves, Abner would buy dogs. He also bought dogs in little back alleys of that most English city, from gipsies with black hair and gold earrings, the real Norfolk Romany, who is as pure as two thousand years of wandering can make him, and brought them

home to Catfield. I said brought them. The truth is they followed him. Abner would buy a strange dog in a hubbub of voices and a parliament of beer and tobacco-smoke, talk to it, quietly fondle its ears—and the trick was done. The dog would follow through all the streets to the carrier's van or the dickey and cart, and home to the roof of thatch by the murmuring reeds. His influence on them was uncanny. Dogs would follow him anywhere, do anything for him. So Abner got high prices for his dogs, mongrel or otherwise.

But when he wanted beer he fought for it. And woe to the man who challenged him. Abner would walk into an inn, quietly size up a likely customer twice his own size and three times as ugly, pick a quarrel or start an argument, and then challenge him for a couple of quarts and a half-sovereign in side bets if he could get them on. Then the fun started. Stools and benches were pushed back, men huddled to the walls, and the scrap was on. Sawdust, oaths, and bets flew as fast as the fists hammered. The hobnails struck sparks from the floor, and Abner ' tapped the claret.' As often as not he knocked his man out.

Things got to such a pass that even in that tear-'em-and-eat-'em county Abner was barred from village inn after village inn until, finally, he would go sometimes as far as fifteen and twenty miles for a fight and unsuspecting village giants in Rackheath and Wroxham, Oby and Thrigby, would find themselves going home on a hurdle.

Abner is dead, but, mourning him, I am moved to tell the tale of Soapey Sponge. Soapey, like his immortal namesake, is a half-bred sportsman—" not quite in the book, my dear, but a *leetle* good blood, and such charming manners "—who lives on his wits and fears no man or beast.

It came about on the Saturday after the Burnley Hall day. I wanted a dog. And dogs, like most other necessities in a world where the best men were fighting, the bureaucrats skulking, and the worst of the Jews setting the pace in black-marketeering, were uncommonly dear. All sorts of people by no means Judaic were asking ten and twenty guineas for gun-dog puppies which, in normal days, would have been dear at five guineas apiece.

So I decided to buy a cross-bred and train it myself. Now in Elm Hill—which is no hill, but a narrow Norwich street of sixteenth-century houses, with cobbled stones and hanging eaves and cloak-and-dagger corners and a six-hundred-year-old inn called the Briton's Arms, which has a thatched roof and is the oldest inn in

Norwich—there dwells, in a semi-subterranean little shop, with his eyes on the level of the street, one Mr Charlie Ketteringham. He bears an ancient name, and there are those who say that a Ketteringham had the lands of Ketteringham Park in Norfolk long before the Boileaus came from France and became baronets and squires of Ketteringham. Be that as it may, Charlie is a dog-dealer, and a shrewd one. So I bowed my head and entered a pandemonium of puppies, fleas, howls, and yappings.

"I want a cross-bred retriever," I said. "A keeper's chuck-out. An Airedale cross will do, for it will have a stout heart, or a pointer or setter cross, but no 'look-dogs.' And my price is a pound."

"There you are," says Charlie. "Lovely litter. All pure-bred Labradors. Pure as the lily. Lovely heads. Good stops. Look at the width! Brains there. Strong feet, too. Swim anything. Gallop a plough. Came from the Carrow Estate—Mr Colman's keeper. Overstocked. As lovely a lot of Labradors as a man could wish to walk with."

I contemplated a squirming maelstrom of black-and-white, black-and-tan, black-and-yellow minute monstrosities, and picked from the witch's kettle a near-black thing like an otter kitten with a look of beagle pup about its feet and legs.

"Here you are—by a beagle out of a Labrador bitch," says I. "And all for a pound!"

"Pure-bred Labrador that is. Win at Cruft's. Pick a mallard in December or find a woodcock in holly," said Charlie. "It's yours, sir. *And* thirty bob to you!" It just slipped in my pocket.

Four months later Soapey Sponge, now a coal-black Labrador with foxhound or beagle legs and nose, was retrieving a partridge, picking wood-pigeons out of the snow, putting rabbits out of rhododendrons, standing naturally to snipe, going quite earnestly mad on a fox-trail, and working a stubble as though to the manner born—which is, and can only be, the true secret of his versatility.

This is the third cross-bred gun-dog I have had which has seemed to be born to the gun, took to it from puppyhood, and had the heart of a lion and the manners of a gentleman. For the rest: constant companionship with master and mistress, firm but kind discipline, sensible feeding, which includes *no* biscuits, plenty of gravy and vegetables, half a pint of warm weak tea a day—"never get distemper if you put the tannin in their stomachs," says Charlie—and a half-pint of beer at night. The results are lions in dogskins.

Above all, begin the elements of training—come, sit, heel, seek

and carry—as soon as possible. Soapey began at eight weeks and at six months, which is the age at which many dogs begin to learn their ABC, was an intelligent and useful companion for a day's rough shooting. He had by then travelled nearly three thousand miles by train and car. To-day he is a first-class wildfowl shooter's dog, swims like a motor-boat, and fears no man.

The next day I went to Acle, that bleak little town of the marshes, to see Mr Ben Sutton and his son, Myrus. Father and son were the remaining two of the farming trinity who must be seen. Ben Sutton was born eighty-one years ago, the son of a Norfolk farm labourer.[1] He knew life in a thatched cottage when beef was fourpence a pound, beer twopence a pint, butter was sold for sixpence a pound 'by the yard,' and cottage rents were a shilling a week—facts which the G. D. H. Coles and the Pink Intellectuals often overlook when they use rural history to defame and damn a rural squirearchy and a farming system of which they never had any practical knowledge. In that age of hard work and common sense Ben Sutton worked first for a few shillings a week on the land, then as a butcher, on sixty pounds' capital saved from his land work and a little pig-dealing, and then as a grazier.

To-day he lives in Freethorpe Manor House, the birthplace of Prime Minister Walpole, and owns most of the village and much other land besides. So the chances for a man to rise, as the phrase is, cannot have been altogether so bad as Lloyd George and the other class-warfare experts have been so fond of painting them. For Ben Sutton is not unique. I know several of his sort and respect them much more than I did the then newly minted Earl of Dwyfor—that ironic climax to a political career spent largely in baiting dukes, ennobling profiteers, burdening the land with death duties, preaching a despicable brand of class hatred, and playing at farming on almost pure sand, dosed and dosed again with artificials. I have seen Lloyd George's farms at Churt, and they did not impress me.

Mr Ben Sutton's farming and that of his son, Myrus, is much more practical and instructive. For Mr Sutton's son, Myrus, is a truly notable man. Six feet tall, broad, ruddy-faced, quiet-voiced, with an almost apologetic manner, he is one of the greatest graziers in the country and pays nearly half a million pounds a year for Irish beef cattle alone. Canadian stores are a secondary line.

[1] Mr Ben Sutton has since died, on November 19, 1945, aged eighty-two, leaving all his land to his son.

Myrus Sutton lives in Halvergate Hall, which is a largish white-brick Georgian sort of a house, a hundred years old, with a tall white Doric portico. It is backed by a vast range of old red-brick barns and cowsheds, all reed-thatched, and looks on neat lawns and rook-noisy elms. Beyond lies the green flat sea of ten thousand acres of the Halvergate Marshes, that great prairie between Acle and Yarmouth. Seamed by gleaming dykes, sentinelled by turning windmills—there are surely more windmills here than anywhere else in England—it is a land of green grass and grazing bullocks in summer and of bitter winds and clanging wild geese in winter.

It is part of the floor of that great estuarine marsh, overflowed by the sea, which cut off the Roman fort of Garianonum from the dry land. Its last vestige to-day is Breydon Water. Reclaimed two hundred and seventy years ago, it is worth sixty and seventy pounds an acre to-day and commands a rent for grazing of from six to ten pounds an acre from April to November. The cattle come off it as fat as moles.

From the house, which stands on the little knoll that, in the old days, made Halvergate Village and its thatched cottages an island amid waters and reeds, one looks across close-cut lawns, through a meadow full of red dairy cows—the only milk cattle about the place—to a brown, tussocky marsh tufted with reeds, gleaming with pools of water, to a fleet full of rusty reeds which goes snaking away into the marshes for a mile or more, a haunt of roosting starlings and springing teal and an occasional bittern. The rest of the marshes are green, well-drained, and dyked, but this old, reedy Halvergate Fleet, once a deep sea-channel, still holds a touch of ancient mystery.

Myrus Sutton owns eleven hundred acres of marshes, some of which his father bought for as little as fourteen pounds an acre. He dresses them with half a ton of basic slag to the acre each sixth year and ten tons of slag to the acre once in ten or twelve years. The rest is inherent natural fertility and bullocks, always bullocks.

In all that ten thousand acres there are few inhabitants—an odd millman, such as Stone, living in a bleak cottage in the middle of windy marsh, and Mr and Mrs Muskett at that lonely inn, the Stracey Arms, in its skimpy trees half-way between Yarmouth and Acle on that dead straight, willow-lined road. The rest is the silence of immense spaces, the light of the sun on high clouds, the lift and wheel of plover, the grey skeins of the winter geese, the wading herons, the snipe in the wet places, and the moving

hummocks which are grazing steers. Do you wonder that the King, who, like his father, loves the solitary places, likes to sit out on that marsh, waiting for the geese ?

Myrus Sutton never has less than a thousand bullocks on the place, and his average weekly cheques to the Irish Free State breeders total eight thousand pounds. It is a pity that we cannot import more Canadian steers and divert the money to a Dominion which played the part of a true friend in war. I thought of the thousands of dead seamen in the green depths of the Atlantic whose lives might have been saved had we had Southern Irish ports to command the Western Approaches, and said so.

"Ah!" said Myrus Sutton thoughtfully and non-committally. "I also like the Eastern Canadian steers. They arrive in cleaner condition than the Irish—spotless, in fact. Beautiful beasts. And they always have clean livers, which the Irish cattle seldom have. That makes ten shillings a beast difference. About fifteen thousand Irish steers come into this country *every week* at an average price of, say, thirty pounds' each. The reason we buy them is that the Irish can breed them better and feed them cheaper than we can. For twenty years the Irish have insisted on nothing but the best bulls. The result is that you can find a first-class pedigree bull in any little Irish village you enter in the grazing countries. Could you find one in every English village ?"

Myrus Sutton's secrets of success are good grazing marshes where the steers, which lose an average of a hundredweight in weight in travelling, can rest, feed, and water, and put on weight and bloom. After from a week to three months on the marshes—according to season and weather—they go into warm, thatched, old-fashioned stalls where they are fed on a ration which works out at: six stone of beet-pulp, six stone of sugar-beet tops, five pounds of oats, beans, and peas mixed in equal parts, and six to seven pounds of hay at nights. Sugar-beet is the main secret, and every acre grown will support a bullock on its by-products for six months, but it should not be fed heavily to young bullocks under eighteen months, as the acid gets into their limbs and joints.

I remembered that he was one of the first farmers to grow sugar-beet, in 1923, against the advice of all his wise neighbours, who predicted bankruptcy.

"Yes," he said, with a grin. "I grew five hundred acres of it, grossed twenty-eight thousand pounds, and made a very good profit indeed! I've grown it ever since. We grow all our peas,



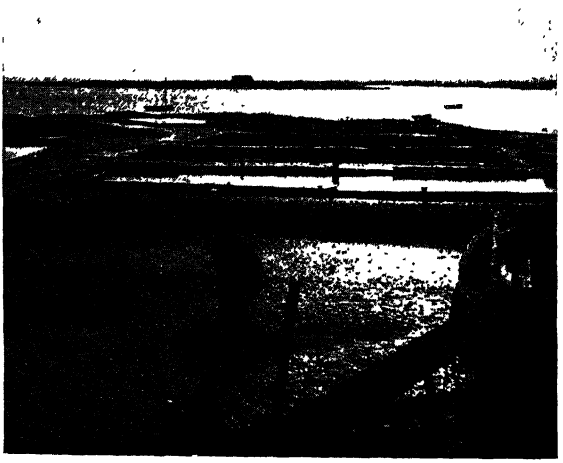


YEOMEN OF THE SEA: "YOUNG" GEORGE STOKER (*above*) AND "THAT HANDSOME VIKING, ALGAR MUSSETT" (*below*), OF MERSEA ISLAND

[*See p.* 132]

Photos "Illustrated"





"Admiral" Wyatt and Mrs Hone, Descendant of John Evelyn, in that "Eclectic Club" which overlooks the Mersea Oyster Pits and Sea-channel (*below*) on the Essex Coast

[*See p.* 135]

Photos "Illustrated"

beans, and oats for the stock, as well, on our two thousand acres of farms. All our stock food is home-grown, and we get hundreds of tons of good farmyard muck in consequence—and *use* it! The result is the land is in first-class heart. We don't rely on artificials alone here! Come and look round."

I went round farms in Moulton St Mary, Freethorpe, and Wickhampton, where they had just thrown one farm of 473 acres *into one field*, using a caterpillar Diesel D4 bulldozer and five-furrow ploughs, caterpillar-drawn. All were in that splendid heart which is the bank balance and the hallmark of the good farmer and worth a ton of the present glut of theories and sales-talk by so-called scientists and publicists for people with fertilizers to sell.

The caterpillar Diesel is the mainstay of cultivation on these heavy and heavyish lands—the maid-of-all-work which goes everywhere and does practically every job in any sort of weather. It has quartered cultivation costs and thrown hundreds of hitherto wasted acres—hedges and the rest—into cultivation.

At Freethorpe, where Walpole's old manor house sits amid its homely barns and stables gazing on the village pond, we stopped at some farm buildings on the roadside. They were thatched and boarded, a great central barn with lean-to cowhouses and pigsties all under one embracing roof of thatch which sloped down at either side to within a foot or two of the ground—a grandmother of a farmsteading under one roof, with the bullock yard at the back and the great double doors facing the road.

Within was the hot, thick smell of wet sugar-beet pulp, the steaming breath of cattle in the golden dusk, great eyes glistening in dark corners, the susurration of nostrils, and the warm, humanizing scent of cattle which is half the life and breath of a farm. Rafters, silver with age, misty with cobwebs, gleamed dully. The roof soared into a black void. Half-doors showed great Hereford-Shorthorn heads, broad and white and massive, with backs as straight as swords. Here and there a Polled Angus cross, but for the main part the Hereford-Shorthorn. That is the cross for beef, depth, brisket, back, and good doing.

"Two hundred years old, this barn—or maybe three hundred, eh, Ted?" said Myrus Sutton.

"Ah! Nigher three hunderd, nigher three hunderd," said Ted. His winter-ripe old face, shrewd as a fox-mask, wrinkled, and his eyes snapped like a sparrowhawk's. "That were built afore the Lord Walpole's time—by his great-granddad, I reckon. An' well-

built tu. Best bullock-shed on the farm, Master. Warm an' dry, for all that's owd an' got a clay floor. That'll beat all the concrete ones yit, eh, master?"

"You're right, Ted," Myrus Sutton answered. "It's our best and warmest shed and not one of the new 'uns anywhere comes up to it."

That is one of the enduring pleasures of visiting the Sutton farms. The farm buildings, like the relations between master and men, are old and well tried. There is a George Morland quality about barns and stalls and sheds, with their roofs of brown thatch, their stout, well-rubbed oaken posts and rails, their huge wooden mangers and glowing old walls, rubbed smooth by centuries of farm animals. I do not belittle the modern farm buildings, and a few tons of concrete are an almighty benediction to man and beast in a stockyard or on a road—but for warmth and the glow of the coloured past, thatch and oak, reed and old brick still hold their own. They do not sweat, and they are kind in winter and cool in summer.

I left Halvergate Hall with real regret. It is good nowadays to meet a practical man, farming in a big way on old-fashioned lines with enough of modern practice to miss nothing, to see warm friendship between master and men, to find real money flowing in a big way. Such a practical example is worth all the nauseating, patronizing ballyhoo and black magic preached by War Agricultural Committees with their school-marm lectures, their petty importance, their wasteful methods and strictly hidden expense-sheets.

Night was fading into apple green and gold in the low west when I came over the bridge and stopped at the Stracey Arms. And laughter came in gusts on the cold river wind.

Within, four men of an unmistakable marshland sort crinkled their faces and slapped their knees at a ruddy man with a whimsical eye and a cattle-dealing cut about him.

"Blast, old Arthur's orf agin—keep him a-goin', boys. You don't mind owd Arthur's yarns, du yu, sir?"

"Not I," says I, for Arthur's eye would have cajoled a bishop.

"So off we goes tu London," Arthur went on, at a hand gallop. "Me an' Jack an' the Boy Art in that car o' mine, a tew hundred-pound Standard an' a lovely job! We warn't gooin' to miss that big fight for no one.

"'Jest runnin' inter Norwich for an hour or tew tu see a man about some bullicks,' I sez to the missus. 'Don't yu set up late, m'dear.'

" Well, we gits tu London, sees the fight—Harringay that was—an' then comes out arter an hour an' a half o' blood an' black eyes feelin' like a bit o' grub. Boy Art sez the Strand Corner Place is the place. So orf we goes. He parks the car in a by-road, an' I stands watchin', hands in me britches, clean boots an' all. Reckon it was the clean boots done it, for——

" ' Good evenin', darlin',' sez a voice.

" An' a rare pretty little mawther, gold hair an' all, ketches howd o' me arm. Tidy little piece, tu! Looks up at me wi' eyes like daisies an' sez, ' Ain't yu lonely, darlin' ? '

" ' Ah! Lonely an' hungry an' lorst,' I sez.

" ' Can I come home wi yu, darlin' ? ' she sez.

" ' That yu can, my little darey-dear,' I sez. ' A hunderd an' forty mile, an' yu can walk it round by the bank or hop on yar little owd bike! '

" Jest then up comes Boy Art. Sees this here little yaller-head a' ketchin' me by the arm, an' he ketches howd of t'other arm.

" ' Come yu home, Dad! ' he sez in a rare gruff voice, an' lugs at me. She lugs one way an' Boy Art lugs t'other, an' there I was in London, clean boots on an' all! Rum owd hole, that is.

" She give up fust! Rare nice little owd piece, tu. Happen I might a' had a bite if me Boy Art h'a'nt bin there!

" Well, we has our grub, an' I lets Boy Art drive home—a good sixty all the way—while Jack an' me sets in the back, puffin' at a couple o' tu-bob scour-me-guts [1] like lords.

" Gits home an' goos up tu the missus. Thinks I, Can't let Boy Art say his piece 'bout that little yaller-head fust. That was tew in the mornin,' tu.

" ' Rare nice time tu git home,' she say, orf the pillow.

" ' Ah! Bin tu London wi' Jack and Boy Art tu see the big fight,' I sez.

" ' An' yu never brought me a fardle,[2] I'll lay a tanner,' she say.

" ' Noo, noo. That were tu late for choclits and sich. But I very nigh brought you a rare fardle,' I say.

" ' What were that ? ' she say, startin' up wi' her ribbons on.

" ' An owd hin,' I say. ' A rare layer, tu! A yaller-headed hin. But there, I doubt if she'ud a-hatched, so I niver brought her arter all! ' "

I went next day to sit and talk and learn bird wisdom from that erudite ornithologist, Lord William Percy. Now, he does not

[1] Cheroots. [2] Present.

write books about birds, or broadcast, or talk wordily, but of all men I should say that he knows more than most.

So we discussed the bittern, to me the most fascinating and certainly the most secret bird in all Britain. When the hairy mastodon roared in the dark forests of Middlesex and the sabre-toothed tiger walked the Downs the bittern was a bird of the night, the haunting voice of the noisome fen. He is still the most mystical and almost the rarest bird that nests in Britain.

Tawny-breasted, with a yellow tiger's eye, a beak like a dagger, a plume from his breast like a wild beard, and back and flanks flecked and streaked in yellowish-brown and chocolate, he is smaller than a heron and a hundred times as rare.

Once upon a time, when all the eastern fens were a wonder of wild wings and shining waters where men went in boats to willowy isles white with the feathers of wild geese and the great swans trumpeted over the meres of Soham and Whittlesey, then the bittern was lord of the night, the symbol of evil and darkness. Old women shrank into their sheepskins and men cast uneasy glances when the dull, thumping bellow of the 'butter-bump' echoed through the fen night over the lonely, roadless, trackless levels of the Great Fen.

To-day you would not find a bittern in a score of parishes in England. Perhaps not in a dozen. Yet when I was a boy, living in an ancient house on the edge of that more ancient fen of Wicken, the bitterns boomed on velvet nights of May and June and pattered gnomishly through the dense reed-beds of that ageless wilderness. One of them, shot in 1906, sits on my desk as I write.

And it is not more than five years since they were nesting each year and rearing their young on my part of Adventurer's Fen, where I had a great mere set in dense reeds, an enchanted place of ducks and reed-warblers and wheeling gulls and weeping plover and, in winter, widgeon and wild geese and the wild call of curlew. Alas, that is all drained. The mere grows potatoes. The bitterns and the grebes have gone. In a dozen other hidden corners of the almost-vanished Old England, the England that was shy of the tarmac road and the petrol pump, the same thing has happened. And though England may have been fed thereby, she is the poorer.

Here and there on a few private, preserved Norfolk Broads, in a deep, undrainable marsh, or in a reed-bed of a great lake in an ancient park, the bittern survives. But you would not know it, for he is of all birds the most secret; a goer-by-night, a skulker in dim

fastnesses of reed and water, a bird so fearful of man that he can, in a second, 'freeze' himself into the semblance of an attenuated spike of dead reed, or fluff out his tawny, tigerish breast feathers, hump his back, arch his wings, and look the most terrifying creature imaginable. And if you wound him he will strike, straight as a dagger, at your eye and perhaps blind you with that spear of a beak. My father's retriever was scalped by a Wicken bittern. It laid the dog's head open from stop to step in one lightning thrust. And if you escape the dart of that three-inch beak and pick up a wounded bittern he will claw you like a cat with those long legs and claws with which he scrambles about on the reed-stems as other birds climb in trees.

Yet, alone and undisturbed, the bittern does no harm and some good. He is, withal, a most English and historic bird, worthy to be preserved, a very part of our almost vanished past, of the England which was unmechanized and unregulated. His food is eels, frogs, slugs, water-beetles, young rats, and possibly a snake if one comes his way.

You do not often see a bittern by day. He is a bird of the night. Occasionally I have seen them winging, heavy and owl-like, over the reed-beds, and I know a man who, fantastically, put one up right under his horse's feet and lassoed it with the thong of his hunting-crop! And I must confess that I once shot one, in mistake for a pheasant, as it blundered out of a reed-bed at home, straight into the sun. But, normally, if you come on a bittern suddenly he will freeze into one of his attitudes—camouflage or defiance, fear or fight.

At night, in spring, when the fen sky is lit by stars and the dark pools gleam, when the wind sighs its shy secrets in the reeds and moths hawk and wild duck pass on whimpering wings, the bittern rises from his tangle of tall reeds and cut-throat sedges and spirals into the sky to serenade his love. It is an eerie, a witch-like, and a boding love-song, that deep "Br-oomp! Br-oomp! Oo-oomp!" which thuds through the silent marsh night. Almost it sounds like a far bull bellowing. It is certainly not the *boom* with which the bird has been credited by people who have probably never heard one.

That is only one of the popular fallacies which has been hung round the neck of the secretive bittern for hundreds of years. It was only comparatively recently that it was generally admitted that the bird *booms* on the wing and as a love-song. Before that it was said that he stuck his beak in the mud or in a reed and that his lungs

acted as organ bellows. Some even said that he beat his breast like a drum. And his names in local lore are legion—mire-drum, butter-bump, bog-bumper, bumble, bumpy coss, bumpie, bittour, and bog-bluiter are a few.

But it was left to one man, Lord William Percy, to reveal the final secret of the bittern. He, with Lord Desborough, Major Anthony Buxton, and Captain Harry Cator, has done more than anyone else to give the bittern sanctuary in England. Lord William is a brilliant ornithologist. He has collected rare ducks in Arctic and sub-Arctic regions, in the United States and Canada and 16,000 feet up in the Andes, the backbone mountain range of South America. And at his home in the heart of the Broads, he not only gave sanctuary to the bittern but spent ninety patient days at one nest, and thirty at another, watching and photographing. It is a feat probably without parallel, capped by the extraordinary fact that he finally induced this wariest of birds to take food—eels and fish—almost from his hand. One of them once ate thirty-two fish straight off and always, after swallowing an eel, remained sitting with its head and neck stuck straight up—because it could not move them for eel!—for twenty minutes or so until the eel had digested.

Sitting in his hide in the reeds on the stinking mud of a small broad almost at his own front door, Lord William gathered more practical information about the bittern than any one man had garnered before.

Finally he established the most remarkable of all facts concerning this highly remarkable bird—that it has four powder-puffs, each larger than a woman's flapjack, and uses them! It also has a stock of cleansing-powder, a comb, and a sac of hair-oil! All these come into use after a bittern has killed an eel and, in so doing, covered its head and neck with glutinous eel-slime. The slime mats its feathers thickly, and, if not removed, would be a danger to the bird's health.

Lord William's patient watchings and photographs proved conclusively that the bird first thrusts its beak into a powder-patch either under its ' arm-pits ' or on its flanks, dusts its feathers liberally with powder again and again, and then combs them out with the serrated edge of its second toe. These toes have ' teeth ' almost exactly like those in a comb. The common heron has them also on his middle toe. After the combing and a hearty fluffing out of the feathers in clouds of powder the feathers were not only cleansed of eel-slime, but all the natural oil had been dried out as well.

So the bittern erected the feathers on its rump, exposing the large oil-sac hidden beneath them, titillated it with its beak until it exuded oil, and then rubbed its head and neck on the oil until every feather was once more oiled. Then the toilet, which took from an hour to an hour and a half and was sometimes performed on the top of a reed clump, swinging precariously, and sometimes on the level marsh, was ended.

Lord William Percy decided, after many days' watching, that he had got the bird sufficiently used to the camera for it to warrant a film. So he rang up Gaumont-British one night, asked for an operator to be sent to Norfolk the next day, put the man in thigh-boots and a smelly hide, and the pictures were taken—at a range of seven feet!

XI. THE BIGGEST FARMER IN ENGLAND

The Remarkable Tale of Mr Billy Parker of Babingley—Thirty-two Thousand Acres in One Family Farming Enterprise—The Man whose Touch is Gold—His Coloured Horses—The Curious Count of East Barsham Manor—And the Rebirth of the Blankney Estate

For never was Cobbett more at home
Than in the jovial company
Of men who lived by husbandry:
Small squires and graziers, met together
To talk of prices, crops and weather,
To pass the steaming jorum round
And stuff their stomachs with good fare.

FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG, *The Island*

FOUR YEARS AGO WHEN I RODE 1200 MILES ON HORSEBACK THROUGH Eastern England in search of good farming, men said with one voice, "You should see Billy Parker—he's the man. He and his boys farm forty thousand acres. Yes, see Billy Parker."

Always it was Billy Parker—not, mark you, Mr Billy Parker or William Parker, Esq., or Master Parker, but plain Billy Parker. And since you may be sure that when the Englishman gives a great man, or indeed any man, the distinction of speaking of him as familiarly as though he were a dear and bosom friend, that man is a man of mark, I made up my mind to meet and seek wisdom from this Billy Parker of whom all Norfolk and half Lincolnshire spoke as men in greater spheres speak of "Winnie Churchill." But always when I sought him he was away, this Prime Minister of farming who, they said, scarcely slept and was always in motion. He motored, they told me, near a thousand miles a week and missed nothing.

Then lo, since mountains sometimes move to mice, I woke one morning to find Mr Parker on the lawn. I owed that good meeting on the frosty steps of the manor house of Uphall at Hillington that morning, as I have owed so many good friends and brave ideas, to a friend of courage as cool and mind as fertile as the mind and courage of Mr Billy Parker—Dorothy, Viscountess Downe.

"Well," said Mr Parker, who turned out to be short, square, and

ruddy with a winter apple complexion and shrewd, amused eyes. He has a perfect poker face which can dissolve into the most disarming smile.

"Well, I've got a car, so we might start," said he. "Run you over to Docking and East Barsham and then the Sandringham farm and then we might look in at Sleaford, and you should meet some of the chaps at Spalding and spend a night in Lincoln, and then, of course, I want you to see what we've done at Blankney, and, if you can manage that in the day, we'll go on to my boy's place in Leicestershire and he'll show you some right good bullocks. Hop in. We'll get moving. Have a cigar."

I may say that Mr Parker is seventy and has never stood still. Yet he has a most reposeful air, which merely hints that America has not yet learnt everything.

But before I start on the tale of that journey with the irrepressible Mr Parker let me tell in brief some outline of how this remarkable man came to be, with his sons, not only the biggest farmer in all England but one of the biggest in the world. For be it known that, in spite of all their talk and bombast, the Americans not only produce *far less* food per acre than the English farmer, but they also have few, if any, farms—other than cattle ranges—which can compare in size and diversity with the Parker family undertaking.

Many—indeed, most—farms in the Eastern States are small, from a hundred to two hundred acres, and below that scale come thousands of small fifty-acre farms and holdings which produce the most miserable crops and, incidentally, provide part of the answer to the United States' most amazing problem—and the least recognized in this country—*i.e.*, that a million families in that country live, or rather exist, on an average income of about fifty pounds a year!

Farther west, in the wheat-belt, farms run from one to ten thousand acres, but farms larger than that are, I should say, rarer than in this country. I stand open to correction, but when I lectured to American farmers their inevitable reaction to the story of the Parker and other farms of over ten thousand acres was one of amazement and admiration. Again and again I was told that such farms were practically unknown "way back home."

But to Mr Parker and his beginnings. Sixty years ago a small, resolute boy with blue eyes walked into a butcher's shop in Leicester and said, "I want a job." He got one—at five shillings a week. The small boy had decided that the way to money was through

cattle. So he decided to begin with them dead and work back to the living beast.

To-day the boy owns the butcher's shop and looks in once a week to see that all is going well. He is also the biggest farmer in England. He lived for years in an old moated hall on the King's private estate at Sandringham, and he and his sons own manor houses, parks, farms, shops, and agricultural industries in Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, and Northamptonshire. And his greatest joy in life is to spend half a day in a cattle-market in his oldest clothes, with a great ash stick in his hand, prodding the pigs, hustling the bullocks round, eyeing the sheep—and giving judgment.

For you may be sure that wherever Mr Billy Parker, of Babingley Hall, King's Lynn, casts up in any agricultural gathering there will be men about him as thick as bees to ask questions.

The tale of this great farmer and shrewd judge of livestock is one of the most amazing ' success stories ' of modern times.

It began when Mr Parker's father, a good yeoman farmer on the Cheshire-Denbigh borders, lost the family money at racing. Young Billy determined to get it back by hard work. He lived at the shop till he was twenty-one and, incidentally, gave the butcher a hiding in his own backyard. Not long after, Billy Parker—then a muscular youth with an uncanny flair for shrewd cattle-dealing—bought the shop and out the butcher went.

He had had a banking account for only three months when his bank manager said to him, " You seem to be making a good deal of money in a straightforward way. If you ever want any capital I'll lend you a thousand." Bank managers still think on the same lines, but bigger, when they encounter Billy Parker to-day. He does not want any loans now.

The first time I ever heard of Mr Parker was on a day when I was shooting partridges on an estate next door to Sandringham. " This man can farm," says I, as we walked by some of the best fields of roots in Norfolk.

" He should be able to," said my host. " He's about the biggest farmer on the King's property, and the old King [as they always call the late King George V in Norfolk] said the same thing that you have just said when he was shooting one day on Admiral Fountaine's place at Narford. So the Admiral told him that the good farmer was Billy Parker, who rented four thousand acres from him.

" Months later, when a tenant died at Sandringham, the King, who was at Balmoral, wired the agent, saying, ' Find Mr Parker

and offer him the farm before anyone else!' George the Fifth knew a good farmer and didn't forget him—that's how our Billy went to Sandringham!"

But his farming is the true measure of his greatness. With his three sons he farms, and largely owns, no less than thirty-two thousand acres, which makes him not only the biggest farmer in England but easily one of the biggest mixed farmers in the world. Very few arable farmers in Canada or the United States reach such figures. His income is big, as you would expect, and nearly all of it goes in income tax, super tax, and Excess Profits Tax, which is why he is to-day farming eight thousand acres less than when I first knew him.

"If I'd gone on farming on that scale I'd have been broke," he said to me. "The more food you produce to-day the more money they take from you! Funny, isn't it, when we're supposed to feed the country?"

Mr Parker and his three sons, Billy, Jim, and Eric, make the patriarchal English yeoman picture—all farming, all with charming and intelligent wives, all with particular specialities, each knowing his men intimately, and all pooling their brains and energy. Russia has nothing to teach that ancient sort of English family common sense. Nor can it equal their farming methods.

This pooling of family brains, team-work, and energy for the common good is one of the most remarkable examples of co-operation I have ever seen in any industry. Each son has an immense tract of country, which he largely owns, and farms himself. Each son also has a speciality. For example, Eric is an expert on flax, Jim on barley and vegetables, and Billy on bullocks. The bigger properties have a resident farm manager, or managers, some of whom, as Mr Grant and Mr Day at Blankney Park, control as much as five thousand acres each. Mr Scoley has three thousand acres of potatoes and vegetable-growing land. Then there are stockmen, pig-men, shepherds, horsemen, market gardeners, and foresters.

Overseeing all is Mr Billy Parker himself—eternally on the move, motoring six to seven hundred miles a week, missing nothing, always ready to praise, criticize, and advise, equally ready to buy or sell anything from a bullock to a pig. Half his secret of arable success is deep ploughing. He ploughs eighteen inches deep on Lincoln heathlands which formerly were ploughed only three to six inches deep.

His eye misses nothing, whether it is a pile of sacks left out in the rain—"dirty farming that"—a grass field that needs lime, or a fallen tree that should be sawn and carted. He has a word and joke for every man in the place and knows not only the names of scores of them but the size of their families and their ailments! Hence an almost incredible spirit of team-work and 'family pride.'

Between them the Parkers own and farm almost every type of land ranging from the light, sandy soil of Norfolk to the chalk and limestone heaths and rich silt fenlands of Lincolnshire, and the deep bullock pastures of Leicestershire. They grow everything from wheat, rye, barley, oats, beet, vegetables, and roots to flax, cattle, sheep, pigs, and horses. They have large forestry interests, three butchers' shops, and an enormous lime-works.

They crown this tale of family achievement by helping to direct one of the biggest flax factories in England.

The flax factory produces five hundred tons of prime flax a year—an industry largely restarted and fostered in this country by the late King George V—and the lime-works turn out six hundred tons of lime a week, and could produce a thousand tons a week. It is now working only ten hours a day owing to labour shortage, in spite of the fact that the lime is badly needed.

Mr Parker discovered the limestone, which lies under five thousand acres of the Blankney property, by accident. Walking in a wood, he found the remains of an old kiln, prospected, and found lime going down to seventy-two feet. Now the works supply farmers in four counties.

As for sheep, the backbone of all light land farming, while they are decreasing alarmingly all over England, Mr. Parker has still kept flocks of two thousand. So one might almost say that whatever he touches turns to gold.

Hence the saying in Lynn Market or in Sleaford Cattle Market: "Billy Parker leads. His touch is gold." The real truth is—common sense and vision.

To-day the Parker farms carry about two thousand sheep, two thousand five hundred cattle, three hundred horses, and thousands of pigs. Before the war they ran an average of two thousand pigs each winter, many of which lived out all through the hard weather in the woods. That was the way they kept and reared pigs in medieval England—on acorns, beech mast, roots, and berries. It still breeds good bacon and saves food.

His cattle are of all sorts. When I went with him to Blankney

Park I saw herds of those quaint, white-waistcoated and black cattle, the Belted Galloways, which come from Galloway and wear white belts. With them were white-faced Hereford bullocks—one of which galloped for half a mile by the side of the car at a steady twenty-two miles an hour recorded on the speedometer. That is half the average speed at which the Derby is run, and good going for a bullock. There were also Lincoln Reds, Shorthorns, black Polled Angus, Jerseys, and innumerable cross-bred cattle. His sheep include Southdowns, Cheviots, Border-Leicesters, and Romney Marsh, while the pigs run from ponderous Large Whites to the hardy Large Blacks who will live out in the open anywhere in any weather, with some Wessex Saddlebacks, Middle Whites, and a few Gloucester Old Spots. Large Blacks are his favourites.

The horses range from mighty Clydesdales and Shires, weighing a ton each, to fast-trotting, old-fashioned Norfolk roadsters who can lift their legs at a good fifteen miles an hour.

But his pride and joy, a unique sight not to be equalled anywhere in England, is the working stud of sixty-eight 'coloured' horses which he has built up in the last few years. These range from plain black and white piebalds to chestnut and white, bay and white, roan and white, grey and white with black points, and fantastic chestnut and white with yellow manes which look as though they had strayed out of a circus.

Their breeding is mixed, but Shire, Clydesdale, and Suffolk Punch blood predominates, with a touch of Percheron here and there and more than one throwback to that grand old breed which George Borrow immortalized in *Lavengro*. This is the old Norfolk pack-horse which, with its Arab cross, produced the finest trotter in the world, the famous old Marshland Shales who was foaled in the archway beneath the altar of the magnificent church of Walpole St Peter while his dam's master, a farmer named Jenkins, was at church. He grew so famous that, at the age of thirty, old men in Norwich Market Place doffed their hats and drew in their breath when the old horse passed by. Colonel Claude Monson, of St Peter's Lodge, Walpole Highway, still owns and breeds that mighty race of horses to-day, where, down on his poplar-edged green fen, they kick their heels, free as the winds off the Wash.[1]

Now, Mr Parker, who has a good romantic eye for pageantry, has set himself the ideal of an all-coloured stud of working horses.

[1] I have told the story of old Marshland Shales and this remarkable stud in *Farming Adventure*.

The result is great piebald horses of Shire and Clydesdale blood who tread the fields at plough or harrow with the slow magnificence of their ancestors, the medieval battle-horses, and quick-trotting roadsters who go about their business in gig, trap, or float with speed and beauty. This is a sight for eyes that are sick of machines and long for the beauty of good horses.

Which is why we once spent three hours in a bitter wind out of the north-east in the middle of a red-coloured field on Blankney Grange Farm, waiting for a capricious June sun to break through the grey battalions of North Sea clouds and give us the colour picture that those horses warranted—Mr Parker, that magnificent photographer, James Jarché, Mr James, the stock manager, and myself.

"I want the ploughman in the picture," said Mr Parker. "These men spend all their lives with their horses. They talk to them and know them as well as they know their children. It's only right that they should be in the picture."

I thought, as I stood in that windy upland field with the plover crying and the far sun shifting in green and gold on tall beech-woods, of the great days when Henry Chaplin, the Squire of Blankney, was in his glory, when Hermit won the Derby in that mythical snowstorm, and when this estate, great as it is now, was greater still, running down into the far, hazy fens and up to the sun-dappled wolds, twenty thousand acres or more of England.

I remember the story of how Mr Parker first bought it. He dined one night at the Ivy with a Norfolk squire from whom he had just bought an estate.

"If you want more land my lawyer has several places to sell," said the squire.

Mr Parker took his name and address and was round at the offices of that great lawyer, Sir Edmund Royds, next morning.

"Land," said Sir Edmund. "Yes, I have several clients who want to sell land. How much do you want—five hundred acres?"

"No," said Mr Parker. "More."

"A thousand?"

"No."

"Two thousand?"

"No."

"Three thousand?"

"No—more still."

"Well, then four or five thousand."

"Not less than five thousand," said Mr Parker. "Then we'll begin talking."

The result to-day is the Blankney estate, famous in political, farming, and fox-hunting history, thirty square miles of once semi-derelict land, now some of the best-farmed land in all England and, even so, less than half the total acreage farmed by this unique family combination of knowledge, initiative, and common sense.

But let us hark back to that frosty morning on the steps of Uphall with Mr Parker offering me an enormous cigar and a quizzical smile. I took the cigar and liked the smile.

"Lady Downe tells me you like old houses," said Mr Parker, "so I'm going to show you a beauty. Ever been to East Barsham Manor?"

"Only the outside," said I, with memories of a snowy day when I first gazed on the lovely gatehouse and perfect Tudor brick of that enchanting house set in a windy fold of North Norfolk barley stubbles, alive with plover, the Stiffkey river a rivulet at its back. East Barsham is truly one of the loveliest small Tudor houses in the country. Its frontage is a poem of ornamental brickwork, equal in detail, if not in size, to anything at Hampton Court or Layer Marney. This old house—which knew Fermors, Calthorpes, and Le Stranges through the coloured centuries and sheltered Henry the Eighth for a night when he made his barefoot pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham—was, thirty years or so ago, when I first saw it, a farmhouse. Eleven hundred acres of good cornland went with it. Owner after owner came and went, and the house began to wear that forlorn look which is the unhappy badge of old and noble houses when they are fallen on neglectful days. Then an odd Austrian, with a taste for architectural revivalism, who introduced himself as the Count of Habsburg-Lothringen, struck North Norfolk, if not "all of a heap," at least markedly. Many and diverse stories were whispered of him, and connexions with the Austrian monarchy were spoken of almost confidently by the more enlightened gossips.

Whatever the truth of these speculations, he at least did to East Barsham what no one else had done. He restored it and not without taste. Meanwhile Mr Parker was restoring the land which he had bought.

"Ten quarters of barley and ten of wheat we got off it, and it only needed care and attention to do it," he said. "And the house stands empty. Just suit you! I'll let it to you cheap because I know you like an old house."

" Throw in a duck-marsh and a river and move it nearer a station, and I'll have it," I said.

" The Count," said Mr Parker, " always had a lot of money coming—thousands. He spent a lot too on the house. And he hadn't bought the house from us either—at least, not paid for it. My boy Jim didn't like to turn him out as he was a nice sort of fellow and always had a fortune just coming from Austria. But I thought it was getting a bit too much, so I moved him—very nicely, you know.

" I just turned up one day with a friend who happened to be an officer in the Canadian police.

" ' Remember now, you're a millionaire, an American one,' " I told him. ' Stick to that.'

" ' What's the idea ? ' he asked. ' Leave it to me,' I said. When we got to the house we knocked. No answer. Knocked again and still no answer. So I lifted the latch and walked in. We were half over the house before the Count arrived—very angry.

" ' Who are you, and why are you in my house.? '

" ' We're just looking round,' I said. ' Very interested in old houses—very.'

" ' That doesn't explain or excuse you walking into *my* house,' the Count exclaimed. Very haughty he was by now.

" ' But my friend wants to buy it,' I said. ' He's Mr So-and-so of America, a millionaire, and he wants to move it across the Atlantic, brick by brick.'

" ' Utter nonsense,' says the Count. ' And what is *your* name, may I ask ? '

" ' Oh! Parker,' I said. ' Just Parker.'

" ' Parker,' said he. ' Parker. I bought this house ' (which, mind you, he hadn't paid for) ' from a Mr Parker. But you're not him! '

' No, I'm just his father,' I said. ' And as my American friend is so keen to buy I thought maybe you'd like to take a handsome profit on your *agreed* purchase price, Count. How would it do if we started to move the house to America, say next month ? It's wonderful how they do transplant old houses across the Atlantic these days! '

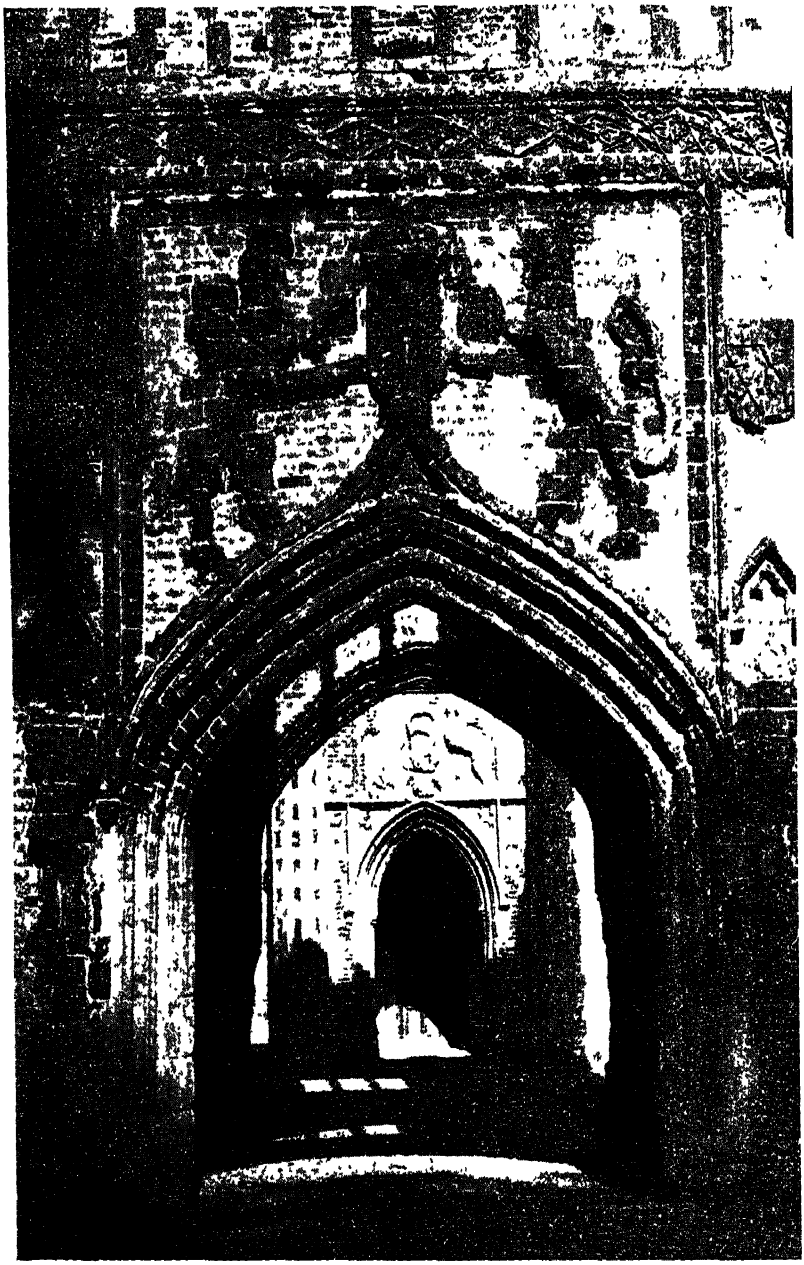
" And," said Mr Parker, with that poker smile, " do you know he saw my point and paid up in no time ? We got our purchase price and we've still kept the old house this side of the Atlantic. Can't let old Norfolk history be carted away like that you know! "



MR W. H. PARKER, OF HEACHAM, NORFOLK, AND BLANKNEY, LINCOLNSHIRE, THE LARGEST FARMER IN ENGLAND

He and his three sons farm 32,000 acres.

Photo "Illustrated"



HERALDRY IN STONE: THE ENTRANCE GATE OF EAST BARSHAM MANOR, NORFOLK, ONE OF THE LOVELIEST MANOR HOUSES IN THE COUNTRY

Photo Douglas Went, Brightlingsea

And our roar of laughter in the harvest dusk sent a barn owl skreeing from a turret of that glorious gatehouse, to drift on outraged wings like a lemon-coloured moth over sleeping stubbles that turned from gold to violet. But I still have a sneaking twinge of fellow-feeling for the gallant Count who sold himself to the love of an old house.

After that we went off to Blankney, over the bridge at Lynn and away up through those flat, black, shining levels of West Norfolk which they call Marshland, and into Lincolnshire. All along those golden roads lie the richest lands in England. We passed one farm which had just been sold for £210 an acre. A few months later that astonishing total was to be passed when another farm went for £250 an acre and a smallholding for as much as £310 an acre. Such prices, it will be said, cannot last, but equally I can never see the day, depression or not, when much of that incredible silt-land is going to fall very far below £100 an acre. Some of it is capable of growing two crops a year with ease.

We stopped at Sleaford, that pleasantly prosperous little town of grey-stone houses, and had lunch at the Bristol Arms, which is just what a country hotel should be on a market-day—warm and comfortable, its creeper-hung coaching yard packed with ruddy-faced men and capable-looking women with a jolly sort of parson to round them off and maids who knew every one by name and the length of their swallow. People were sitting at long wooden tables under the creepers in the yard, fixing deals, buying and selling invisible beasts, and talking corn and cattle.

We lunched in a room full of good mahogany and silver and hunting prints, and there I met Mr Bembridge, a keen, alert, likeable young farmer from Billinghay, a great Lincoln Red man, and Mr Horace Burgess, of Welbourne Grange, who farms about three thousand acres and with whom I talked Percherons, for he is a great breeder of those magnificent horses and does not like selling them either, for, says he, " when you sell a good horse you lose a good friend and a good servant—and life's too short for such losses." Mr Barker, who is a cattle-dealer from Grantham way, joined us, and we talked politics and the ebullient Mr Kendall [1] and the way in which he had torpedoed the sluggish and complacent Conservative organization in that ancient town which might yet be won back easily enough by an energetic Tory with a live mind.

And then on to Blankney. That historic home of sport had

[1] Denis Kendall, Independent M.P. for Grantham.

always attracted and fascinated me, as who would not be by the memories of Squire Chaplin and the great days of the Blankney Hunt. It is a disappointing house—large, grey, and austere, of no particular style or period unless we are to call it Georgian. It has neither grace nor real distinction, but merely a grey, uncompromising affinity with its wide uplands, immense fields, and great beech-woods. But the park is noble, the trees and woods well grown and dispersed and the four-mile avenue superb. The kennels of the hunt are still in the grey village, and it was good to hear hounds' voices clear on the air.

After Squire Chaplin had exhausted his own, and most of the Blankney, resources in that picturesque tragedy of Edwardian extravagance which was unhappily duplicated in so many families by the taste of those fatal " ten golden years," the estate fell on bad farming days until, as I have said, when Mr Parker bought it, many farms were only half farmed, fields were rough and full of docks and thistles, hedges blind, and many roads choked and grown over, buildings roofless, and yields down to little or nothing. The average depth of ploughing was from three to five inches only. Be it remembered, however, that it had never been ploughed deeper, since the topsoil is shallow and the subsoil lime and chalk and gravel. So, as they say in all too many other parts of England, there was no need to plough deeper. But Mr Parker did. He ploughed from two feet to eighteen inches deep, and the land and the crops both justified it. He grubbed up the hedges, threw little fields into big ones, bulldozed the gorse coverts—woe is the fox-hunter!—levelled the many gravel pits, and cleared the farm roads and bottomed them.

The result to-day is that on Blankney Barff Farm they grow fifteen tons of potatoes to an acre, and actually reached seventeen tons with Epicures, which was surpassed on Mr Battle's farm at Branston, where they actually lifted *nineteen* tons to the measured acre.

To-day, on Blankney Barff, the buildings are in splendid order, the great glass tomato-houses show visible results in mountains of boxes stacked and roofed, ready for market, and the soil is ploughed from ten to twelve inches. Previously it grew poor crops and was ploughed only three to five inches.

Much the same has happened at Temple Grange Farm, at Navenby. Formerly it was solely sheep and barley, a high farm on limestone, ploughed shallow. To-day it is ploughed twelve to

eighteen inches deep, the limestone is turned up and holds its own in dry seasons, and the land produces wheat, sugar-beet, barley, sheep, and pigs. Mr Parker is going to run more pigs, many more pigs, on potatoes and out in the beech-woods, for as Mr Gwynt, the farm manager, drily remarked to his *vis-à-vis*, Mr Day—who used to be farm bailiff to that excellent Cambridgeshire farmer, Sydney Taylor, at West Wratting—"We don't keep any afternoon farmers here, or any empty woodlands."

Both men had that morning had their respective blocks of farms certified 'A,' which is pleasing even if you *do* know that such men and methods were A1 long before committees and poke-nose officials with petty diplomas were thought of.

From Temple Grange I went to see the great flax-works at Nocton in which Mr Parker has a substantial interest and of which Eric is director-manager. It was handling five hundred tons a year in 1942 and is probably up to six hundred and fifty or more tons a year now, employing a hundred and eighty hands, mostly girls. It is a great tribute to this Lincolnshire flax that the Belfast merchants say that they prefer it to any from any other part of England. About 12 per cent. is reckoned a good yield of fibre per hundredweight. The shives are sent away and used for polishing tinplate. Sixty per cent. of the flax produced at this factory was being used for parachute harness. I know of no other factory with so high an output. The aerobic method of retting is employed, which does away with dew retting or dam retting—and incidentally does not poison the local fishing waters!

The soil at Nocton is ideal for flax-growing, a medium loam with a clay subsoil, as flax is very susceptible to drought. With luck the entire crop is sown and pulled within a hundred days.

It is a crop which other farmers elsewhere would do well to consider, for in pre-war days Russia and the Baltic States supplied 75 per cent. of our flax and Belgium grew the finest qualities. Now is our chance to grow the crops, grab the markets, and cut out the Continental go-betweens. The serious manner in which Mr Parker foresaw the demand—and the chance—for home-grown flax before the war is best emphasized by the fact that he sent his son Eric to study German textile manufacture in Germany for ten months.

The blacksmith's shop at Nocton, housed in old farm stables, is capable of handling all tractor repairs and electric welding and brazing. Wiseman, the manager, had a month in the Lanz tractor

works at Mannheim before the war in order to study German methods.

After miles of farms and factories, bulls and tractors, we retired to a tea of home-grown ham and eggs, and discussed everything from horses to meat prices, E.P.T. to Irish labour, from War Agricultural Committees to adequate parliamentary representation for agriculture.

Said Horace Burgess, who was there, "My tractor repair bill is between two and five hundred a year. That is partly why I still keep horses." And, he added, "Twenty-five per cent. of the farmer's E.P.T. should be remitted *at once*, so that we can get on with the job of putting our land and machinery in a proper state to meet post-war competition. It's no use giving us twenty per cent. *after* the war. Industry will pick up then, whereas farming will have no guaranteed future and precious little hope. Let's have the money now and let the Government save it by stopping the extravagant waste by War Agricultural Committees on expensive and uneconomic 'farming' and reclamations."

That view, from one of the most successful farmers in Lincolnshire, who farms between three and four thousand acres at Dowesby, Poynton, Dunsby, and elsewhere, is typical of what I have heard from responsible men all over England.

Mr Burgess cited a man in Lincolnshire who, farming two thousand acres of good land with £60,000 capital, made a profit of £41,000. His previous standard was £10,000, so he paid £5,000 in income tax with super-tax on top of it, which left him with £2,000 a year to live on and pay all the heavy and varied replacements which are inevitable on a highly mechanized and cultivated farm.

Mr Parker thereupon interjected that he himself paid thousands a year in taxes and was in debt on the Blankney estate farms, solely because of the high rate of E.P.T.

"Yet," said Parker and Burgess suddenly together, "when we two went to Germany in nineteen-thirty-one to study their farming we found farms near Magdeburg rented at six pounds an acre with German wheat selling at twenty-six shillings per quarter, delivered in England. All their men were in work and well paid, and their wheat was being *exported* to *England*!"

I reminded them that Mr Burgess had, to my knowledge, got two to three thousand tons of corn, peas, and potatoes off about eight hundred acres of derelict land which he reclaimed without a

penny of profit to himself, yet had most War Agricultural Committees—tax-free and able to spend what they liked—done the same job it would have cost the taxpayer about thirty pounds an acre.

Mr Parker, listening quietly with his Buddha-like smile, put the case for the future of farming in a phrase.

"We must all combine," he said slowly, "the National Farmers' Union, Central Landowners' Association, National Union of Agricultural Workers, the Potato Federation, the corn merchants and the dairy farmers—*and put a hundred agricultural M.P.'s into the House!* Then they'll listen to us. The towns have nearly all the votes, three-quarters of the M.P.'s, and we have to put up with any little barrister candidate they send us, and any sort of dole they like to hand out to the industry—except, of course, when there's a war on and the country has to be fed. Then the landowners and the farmers are suddenly remembered.

"And, mark you"—Mr Parker wagged his finger vigorously—"I'm not one of those who run the old lords and squires down. They were good landlords most of 'em. I've farmed under a good few. They *know* the land and they did well by it and by farming when we used to send them to Parliament. But now they're taxed and death-dutied out of their places and *we* suffer from the loss of their voices in the House. So we'll have to lift up our own and *shout*!"

Delivering which piece of horse-sense, he sat back and smiled.

That is not the least of the wise words of this remarkable man, who wastes few. He says, and rightly, that far too much young meat is killed in war. It should be allowed to breed before being killed, whether it is lamb, veal, or pork. He says also that all meat, young or old, should be *sold at the same price per pound*, thus destroying the incentive to kill young animals, preventing unfair under-the-counter discrimination by butchers, and ensuring bigger breeding stocks and more meat, milk, and wool for several years ahead. It is incontrovertible sense.

On that note we retired to Lincoln and the sober contemplation of dinner and a glass of port in the White Hart whose cellars are as good as its collection of clocks. Good wine and good food go hand in hand with good farming under the shadow of that magnificent cathedral.

Next morning Mr Parker was astir long before anyone else, down to breakfast, ruddy and brisk, and we were off, he behind the enormous and inevitable cigar, his sole personal extravagance.

We went through Wisbech, sitting demure and grey like a Quaker Lady Peckover on the muddy quays and swirling brown flood of the Nene. A few good Georgian houses, bland and respectable, whispering of fat but not pretentious bank balances, sit like a row of frozen maiden ladies on the banks of that unbeautiful river whose sole distinction is that it periodically produces an 'eagre,' or bore, a miniature tidal wave which froths and rushes upstream, jostling little boats, upsetting families of ducks, setting the small coasters and timber boats which have ventured so far inland tossing as though at sea, and pretending generally that it is on the point of flooding the entire town and drowning its people but, most magnanimously, changing its mind at the last moment.

The outstanding historical, architectural, judicial, and humanitarian monuments in this otherwise undistinguished but excessively rich town are the cellars at the Rose and Crown.

For here, buried in dark, cool vaults by the muddy river's brim, are pipes and pipes and pipes of the best port wine in the kingdom. It is a tradition and not just a war-time hide-out. Wisbech, like King's Lynn, has always been the fortunate of the gods, for in those two towns, by some alchemy of soil and temperature, the cellars keep port better than cellars anywhere else. So let us doff our caps, bend our knees, and pour out our silver and gold to the ware of Wisbech and King's Lynn. Vintage wines of 1868, 1887—have you ever drunk it, dear reader, pale gold in colour with a touch of tawny, but with the body of an angel's blood?—1908, 1912, 1927, and, that latest sainted addition to the heavenly throng, 1937. There, if you like, is a cadence of angels, a carillon of most bibulous bells, a bouquet of most sacred scents, and a gathering of praise and holiness. So you need scarcely wonder that both Mr Parker and I raised our hats most solemnly as we passed through this sainted town and mourned that the hour was so young.

I like that road through the flat, rich black fens, perhaps because I am a fenman born, perhaps because the mind dwells on those old tales of the wild fens of Guthlac and Crowland, perhaps because, to-day, it is some of the best farmed land in England, rich and well tilled, a monument of man's wisdom and natural powers. The houses are mostly excessively ugly, built of that hideous white Cambridge brick which is man's most barbarous gift to man—square, featureless, slated boxes with square, featureless windows, all of an unbelievable mediocrity, all infinitely less pleasant to the eye and far colder in winter and hotter in summer than the old

thatch-and-plaster farmhouses and cottages which they have most gauchely supplanted.

They look, these grimly respectable, defiantly unbeautiful fen cottages and farmhouses, like a smug crew of canting psalm-singers off to worship on Sundays and ready to swindle their neighbours on Mondays.

Guyhirne whispered of great skating matches of one's youth when "Fish" Smart and "Gutta-percha" See and the rest of the striding giants swept like the wind over the cracking ice and the air was keen, the blood was hot, and all the jolly fen people were out to play.

Thorney, with its grey abbey set in a little green park of oaks and shining waterways, its tree-shaded causeway and good houses, is a standing memorial to those Earls and Dukes of Bedford whose genius and foresight drained these vast fens and made the wilderness a plot of gold long before planners and bureaucrats were hatched from their dreary pigeonholes to tell us that no progress can be achieved without first filling in a form and then sitting back to wait interminably. If the modern Ministry of Agriculture was faced with the problem which those great Russells and their associates conquered there would be a ministerial cataclysm. When I think of the forms, officials, petrol, waste of money and time, publicity ballyhoo, and photographing of diplomaed deadheads which are necessary to-day before a paltry thousand acres is drained, at great cost to the taxpayer, the mind boggles at the mental state of the Ministry and its poke-noses, Army dodgers, and other indispensables, were they faced with the task of draining more than a quarter of a million acres of primeval swamp, of which notable success Thorney to-day is a permanent witness.

It is a land of long, luminous fields and shining dykes, of marching willows and turning windmills which still grind the corn, of great farmhouses islanded in elms and poplars, of thousands upon thousands of acres of cabbages, fruit, tomatoes, and potatoes where women still work in the fields in sun-bonnets and the sun goes down in the most magnificent sunsets in all Britain. A land of vast farms and of tiny farms, but of farms which all make money and cost money. We passed one 280-acre farm on the Peterborough road which had sold the week before for £100 an acre, and that was not a notable sale. It is the English Ukraine, but three times better farmed than that granary of All the Russias. I would like the English Communists and Left Wing Ineffectuals, with their

brittle wits, to come and see the fenland small-holder with his magnificent soil and skill and hard-working wife before they praise the land they have never seen. Unhappily, Left Wingers cannot be tempted far into the fresh air. It is fatal to their theories, though good for their complexions.

You may not like the ugliness of the new fen houses, but the skill and industry of the men and women who live in them, the dyke-to-dyke perfection and tidiness of their fields, is unmatched. This is farming—and much, mark you, small farming of a few acres only—at its peak.

About here at Gedney, and farther north at Goushill, Roger Wentworth, forbear of our Nettlestead branch and of the Paul of Burnham Abbey, Bucks, owned vast lands which came to him in June, 1423, when he married Margery, the young widow of John Lord Roos of Hamlake, who was killed in the battle of Baugé, near Beaufort in Anjou, on March 22nd, 1421. She brought Roger the lands which she had inherited from her father, Sir Philip le Despencer of Gowshill, now called Goxhill, whose own ancestor, also Philip, had got them by marriage with the heiress Margaret Gonsel or Gonshill, in 1312. To-day those lands at Gedney and Knarr Fen, which once were drowned fen and osier isle, are near-gold.

I thought of these changes in the face and ownership of the fenlands as we passed through Peterborough, that town of trim red villas and a dull High Street, with its stumpy cathedral carrying the pepper-pot between its finials. It is an odd, unfinished-looking building, as though the monks had started with a vision of Ely in their eyes but gave up because the winds off the fen were too cold.

To-day Peterborough means potato kings and the Hound Show, with the Duke of Beaufort on the flags and Mr George Evans, of Hampshire, looking on like an approving Jorrocks.

Beyond Peterborough the country changes to wide vales and big woodlands, old parks and grey-stone cottages, beef cattle and foxes. The potatoes and tomatoes and the flat black fields are suddenly a memory.

We went through that lovely little grey village of Wansford in England, with its graceful church which got its name, you will recollect, because of the man who fell asleep on a haystack which was washed down the river on a sudden flood, and when he woke in a start and a flurry, stranded in a field at Wansford, inquired

where he might be, and being told, exclaimed with mighty relief, "What! Wansford! Not Wansford in England? God be praised!"

And so through King's Cliffe, which is a noble village of the dignified Colly Weston stone, to Duddington-in-the-Vale, which has a stone water-mill in a street of stone houses among gardens full of autumn flowers, past tall old woods, lonely on far rises, till we came at last to Keythorpe Grange—and all the time, mark you, with Mr Parker discoursing with illumination on deep ploughing, and lime and phosphates and beef cattle and Irish labour which earns eight pounds a week, pays no income tax, causes village brawls, and sends its spare cash home to the country whose Government snivelled in 'neutrality' behind England's skirts when all the world was gripped in war.

Keythorpe is young Mr Billy Parker's place. It is four thousand acres, formerly mostly rough pasture. It has been ploughed fifteen inches deep once in three years and from eight to ten inches in other years, and limed from one ton an acre to as much as eight tons—all from the Parker lime-works at Longwood in Blankney. Now it grows wheat and potatoes and beef cattle. Most of the land lies below that lovely Elizabethan mansion of Quenby Hall, high on the ridge with its windows winking in the sun, looking to the far haze of Charnwood Forest like a long, low cloud in the bright western sun. Standing thus in its walled garden and cedars, high in a park full of Mr Harry Gibbins's shorthorns, Lincoln Reds, and Herefords, it was a house to gaze upon and love. Land round about Quenby, much of which belongs to that good fox-hunter, Sir Harold Nutting, and to Mrs Fielding Johnson, is worth from fifty to sixty pounds an acre.

We went round by Hungarton, Tilton, and Scraptoft Hall, and I saw a fifty-acre field which had been sold for £50 an acre to a man who cut all the turf off it and sold it at sixty pounds an acre to make lawns, then returfed and repeated this highly ingenious process over a period of years. Scraptoft Hall, which Edwardians knew as the home of that mighty fox-hunter, Squire Burns-Hartopp, is now the offices of a bicycle company, and Keythorpe Hall, where lived Mr Fernie, the archduke of hunting, now houses a boot-and-shoe magnate. The Hemploe stands empty. Brooksby was for sale, and the shade of "the Yellow Man"[1] had departed from the stables

[1] The late Earl of Lonsdale.

of Barleythorpe. Yet, for all this melancholy ravage of death and war:

When the first pale sun of November
Has lighted the falling leaves
I doubt not the Dead remember
How it shone on their scarlet sleeves,
And out of their slumber waking
Those heroes, the hunting squires,
Swing into their saddles, taking
Their old front place in the Shires.

Next morning we saw thousands of acres of Leicestershire bullock pastures, once some of the richest old grassland in England, ploughed up. Gone were the huge, galloping pastures which saw Whyte-Melville composing his songs of the saddle and Squire Osbaldeston, small and defiant, Mr Tailby's hounds and "Skipworth on the grey"; the Austrian Empress in her flowing habit, and Dick Christian clearing the Whissendine at a pace "too good to enquire." Instead, the oxers were memories, bulldozed up by the roots, and the stubbles spread far and grey in the sun. We stood under a roadside oak and discussed these matters of high treason in the kingdom of beef cattle and foxes with Albert Farnsworth, who is a man of knowledge and broad in mind on such things.

There are two points of view on this vexed matter of ploughing up old pastures which has perplexed and angered so many men in the Shires, in the Vale of Aylesbury, in the rich Berkeley Vale, and in other green places where fat ox is king. So let us listen to the wisdom of Albert Farnsworth, with his lean, keen red face under the owl oak, his slow voice and quizzical smile.

First there is the point that if you plough up old pasture it will, in due course, reseed itself with plenty of white clover. But, says Albert, there are a main of folks in Leicestershire who will say that such young pastures will fat only *young* bullocks, that no old bullock would do well on them—in plain, that young beasts thrive well on young pastures and old beasts do not, but that old pastures have a higher all-round feeding value and are good alike for young and old beasts.

"Well," says Mr Parker, with that innocent, blue-eyed smile which always appears when he is least ignorant of a subject, "isn't it a fact, Albert, that these old pastures of yours hereabouts—mind you, I'm only a Norfolk farmer and no Leicestershire grazier—are constantly rejuvenated and improved by the dung and urine of successive grazings? Doesn't the bullock put back as much—oh,

and *more*!—into the pasture than he takes out of it? So the older the pasture the better it is? Like a safe investment that goes on adding to itself—so long as you don't gamble with it!"

"That's about the size of it, Mr Parker," says Albert. "But you see, Mr Hudson and his schoolmasters don't know so much about farming as you do, Mr Parker. They've never had to bring up a family on it."

"Maybe," says Mr Parker, with an innocent twinkle, "but it isn't the same everywhere, is it? Now at Blankney we've done a lot of good by ploughing up old pastures because most of 'em were worn out, and we shall do a lot of good for ourselves by putting down new ones. *And* we've got some rare good crops off these Leicestershire lands. Whether that will be the best thing for the future, I don't know. My boys will have to worry that out." On which note, the only possible answer to the present-day problem of ploughed-up old pastures, we left Albert, smiling philosophically under his oak.

Soon we came to a farm at Rotherby, where I was told that the War Agricultural Committee had left forty to fifty acres of potatoes in the ground till March, with the result that between four hundred and five hundred tons of good food had been wasted. So I capped this tale of wanton waste with the story of how I personally saw the Cambridgeshire Committee waste the better part of *a thousand tons* of potatoes on land in Burwell Fen, and as much or more again on neighbouring land.

"Bags upon bags of artificial manure were left by 'em by the roadside for two or three months near here," said a farmer, who had joined us by then. "The bags rotted and the artificials were ruined. Yet farmers were begging for it and bags were at a premium. When I went over to the Committee's repair-shops at Anstey I saw men standing idle for days. Yet when I wanted a man to repair my drum they couldn't spare one. Yet they teach farmers their business! One committee I know has one good farmer on it, two part-time farmers, a solicitor, an iron-founder, and a yarn-spinner. An 'officer' in one county I know went broke for seven thousand pounds as a farmer! These are the men who are to teach us our business—the chaps that Mr Hudson says in Parliament have never made a wrong decision!"

We went on a few miles, and they showed me a field which the War Agricultural Committee had ploughed from three to four inches deep. I tried to drive my walking-stick into the hard 'pan'

beneath this soil scratching. The ground was like iron. Over this miserable pretence of ploughing a land girl was driving a tractor pulling a disc harrow with the discs riding free over the surface, barely cutting one inch deep. One might as well have tried to make a seed-bed out of corrugated iron. Had a practical farmer cultivated that land it would have been ploughed ten inches deep and the discs would have been properly set. But practical farmers say they cannot get the labour. The War Agricultural Committees pool labour. No farmer can *take* their labour, but any of their men can leave them to join the Committee's ' pool ' and idle their time away.

I give these complaints and instances, not in any carping spirit, but because they are typical of complaints which one can hear in practically every county in England. They have a real and justifiable basis. Yet few local papers publish them, apparently because they labour under the mistaken delusion that any criticism of a Government Department in war-time is bad for the ' war effort ' or because, in some cases which I know, they receive their " Agricultural notes " free, gratis, and for nothing direct from the local Committee's publicity ' officer '—soothing syrup in a gilt mug.

In Parliament Mr Hudson repeatedly refused to allow publication of the accounts of these squander-maniacs and declared that although they have evicted approximately three thousand men and women from their holdings—and in many cases their actual homes—and another seven thousand from portions of their lands, " in no case was the decision wrong." [1]

If the town taxpayer only realized how much public money has been squandered by these self-appointed archangels of flawless justice and unimpeachable knowledge he would vote the whole system to that limbo in which other and equally totalitarian regimes have been burned. It is rural Fascism, no less.

[1] Mr Tom Williams, the present Minister, refuses to reconsider these evictions, although appeal tribunals are now to be set up But the old scandals remain unremedied

XII. ON THE HEATHS OF NEWMARKET

Shooting at Culford—Mr Jack Olding and Mr Alan Clark—History and Sport on the Suffolk Heaths—The Old Road of The Tribes—Round the Stables at Newmarket—Some Trainers—The Rutland Arms and Charles the Second—The Hounds who hunted an Earl—The Jockey Club, its Powers, Wealth, Lands, and Pictures

> I shoulde wishe your Majestee to goe to Newe Markett which Is the sweetest place in the Worlde and beste Ayre and noe place like itt for Hunting, Haukinge and Coursinge and Horse Races . . . and Your Royall Father sayde hee did alwayes furnishe himselfe ther with Horses and Houndes for Sumer Huntinge. . . .
>
> *Extract from a letter from the Duke of Newcastle to Charles II, in the Welbeck Abbey Library*

I WENT ON THE LAST DAYS OF THE OLD YEAR OF 1944 TO SHOOT with Alan Clark, of Boyles Court, at Culford, which Jack Olding with his pasha-like generosity had placed at his disposal for a day—shoot, keepers, beaters, lunch, everything. That is typical of Jack. He does nothing in a small way. Even his output of tanks was one of the war's miracles of production.

Equally his pioneer work in introducing the caterpillar Diesel tractor and the bulldozer to England has done an incalculable national service. Without the caterpillars and bulldozers we should not have reclaimed so many thousands of acres of land so quickly, nor cultivated them so thoroughly, nor should we have been able to lay down airfields at that speed which made us masters of the European air in miraculous time. One day perhaps the full story of the great work done at Hatfield will be told, and the country will realize what it owes to the dawn-to-dusk hard work and the pre-war vision of Jack and his fellow-directors. But since they are not a Government department and have to work on lines of economic common sense they naturally do not employ a string of hired hacks to trumpet their good deeds.

Jack is fiftyish, boyish, ruddy, active, and clear-skinned, with a merry and a penetrating eye, a cheerful grin, a cold-bath voice, and an immaculate taste in shirts, collars, and ties. He is energetic, ebullient, shrewd, and generous. He cannot tolerate fools lightly. I should say that his firm has a turnover of several millions a year. But you do not see him in the West End at night.

He is at work at eight in the morning, calls a conference at 9.30, lunches in a catholic circle which may include anyone from a Cabinet Minister to an air ace, and dwells in a plain but efficient office, whose windows gaze on harvest fields and whose sole decorations are a portrait of a partridge and one of a pheasant, plus a cocktail cabinet concealed behind 'the library.'

He never forgets old friends, gives generously and without fuss to those in need, keeps racehorses for fun and not because they win races, lives for shooting and farming, and goes home religiously each night at six to his wife. All of which, you will agree, are good and human qualities. Neither Minister nor monarch would shake him from that rigid rule. He has built his own enormous business from scratch.

Alan Clark is another example of how private enterprise, the bedside bogey of the vegetarian Cripps and the dilettante Dalton, has accomplished miracles of offence and defence in war. At the end of the last war his father bought a small radio business with fifty pounds and presented it to his son on his emergence from the Army. It was typical of that shrewd, Henry Ford-like old gentleman, whose acumen is a byword in Canada. "Radio's coming. Get in on it," was his advice.

To-day Alan Clark's Plessey Radio Company employs thirteen thousand people, makes every form of aircraft equipment, and is one of the greatest radio undertakings in the world. In addition it inhabited, during the war, nine miles of tunnels under one of London's main roads where were hatched many of the secrets of radiolocation which won the war in the air.

Alan Clark, the architect and helmsman of this vast concern, is large, genial, and humorous. He moves through life like an amiable galleon in full sail, superbly gunned with cigars. He is incredibly reminiscent of that gay buccaneer, the late Valentine Castlerosse, dimly suggestive in profile of Beverley Baxter in his less pontifical moments. A really first-class shot, he scored 100 per cent. at the all-London clay-pigeon shoot, and, I am told, is a deadly fly-fisher. I have not seen him fish, but few birds have time left to squeak when he raises his gun.

Let us, then, with these introductory handshakes, haste to Culford.

Culford is, as all good shooting men know, an Elysian estate which lies hidden in those great Suffolk heaths and deep woodlands which cover all the country from Bury St Edmunds to Thetford.

Once upon a time, in the gay and gilded days, it belonged to Lord Cadogan, and before him to an ancient gentleman named Duval. It was roughly eleven thousand acres, and the cartloads of pheasants, the wains full of partridge, and the trainloads of hares and rabbits which were there slain were a milestone in shooting history and an ever-present local industry. For that is a part of the world where shooting is of the whole duty of man.

The land is light and poor, so sandy that a hundred years ago it got up and blew away in great sandstorms which blotted out the coach roads, smothered the bridle-paths, and overwhelmed whole farms. Neither sheep nor crops would do well. But rabbits, which can be shot, eaten, and turned into hats, were a manifest and manifold harvest. Pheasants followed. With the pheasants came woods and belts and plantations. They stopped the sand blowing, sheltered the vast fields and vaster heaths, gave beauty to the landscape and a chance to grow barley and rye to the farmer. All due to the pheasant. The partridge, who follows good farming as the sun follows rain, was the pheasant's bedfellow. And hares waxed mightily.

So, in the good old days, when Edward VII was on the throne and the East Anglian firmament was full of shooting stars, you might find any or all of the great men with a gun staying in that graceful mansion with its Doric pillars and sunny front. Sir Harry Stonor, de Grey, Walsingham, Freddie Fryer, Lord Huntingfield, Lord Savile, Duleep Singh, whom Norfolk knew as "the Black Prince," all worshipped at the gunpowder shrine of Culford. It is a place of mighty ghosts.

To-day the house is a school and the Forestry Commission owns six or seven thousand acres of it. True to form, it is doing its utmost to obliterate the windy heaths beneath dense, dull, Germanic blocks of closely planted conifers which will be next to useless for timber and a breeding-haunt for every sort of vermin. It is forestry which no private individual can afford, and no wise man would attempt. Yet since the Commission costs the public purse an average of £800,000 a year it can naturally do no wrong in the popular eye. It would be interesting to know exactly how much timber the Commission's expensive experiments in the past twenty years have provided the country with during this war![1]

If I am to judge by a well-known Norfolk builder's remarks to

[1] It has since been announced that no less than 95 per cent. of the home-grown timber used during the war was provided by private landowners—a pretty commentary on State "efficiency."

me—" I would not have Forestry Commission timber in one of my yards or workshops if I could get good private or foreign-grown wood. It's poor, cheap, and brittle "—it has not justified itself in any way.

The shooting over this great block of land has been held by Jack for eleven years. Thanks to the hawk-like perception of Colonel Harry Lambert—his shooting, hunting, and coaching director—a first-class head-keeper in Mitchell, and the inheritance of good Cadogan plantings plus the fact that the Forestry Commission wildernesses have not yet grown to their full stature, the shooting has been superb. It still is.

There are enduring memories of that day—a snow-whitened landscape between Brentwood and Newmarket, deeper snow and icier winds beyond, dinner and a bed at the Bull at Barton Mills, where they considered that one bogus electric ' log ' constituted a fire; then, in the morning, mile beyond mile of glittering heathland where pines and firs stood dark and stark in a landscape wide, white, and empty.

At Elveden, where you turn off for Culford, stands that tall obelisk in the midst of the desolate heath, mute memorial to Elveden's dead. It is a reminder of the eighteenth-century days when these sandy heaths were so wild and empty of man that a rude lighthouse was built of tree-trunks and a lantern set therein to guide horsemen and coaches across this Arabia Deserta on the borders of Norfolk and Suffolk.

North Stow Farm, in the middle of the King George the Sixth forest in the heart of the Culford shoot, is one of those square, flint-and-white-brick, heath farmhouses which, in spite of their uncompromising fortress look, have definite grace and native charm. They belong to this picture of sandy heath and sighing pine, of stony breck and rusty bracken and long miles of utter empty loveliness, where great woods crown the slow swells of the heaths and the pheasants crow in the sunset.

North Stow, islanded and alone in heath and fir-wood, is built in a strongly classical style with an almost Adam sweep of wall and broken eave overlooking a pond set in a perfect horseshoe of low flint wall. Beyond are old herring-bone brick and half-timbered barns and stables which must surely have belonged to an older, Elizabethan house. It is a gentleman's house in its severe grace and loveliness.

Here lives Mitchell, the head keeper, a tall, spare muscular man

in green cords, with a windy red face and sharp brown eyes. He has the true Norfolk keeper's flair for pheasant generalship. Here too, on rare week-ends, dwells Jack, far from tanks and bulldozers, with a dog and a gun and the crowing pheasants to keep him company.

One remembers the high-lights of that day, since it was five long war years since I had had a real old-fashioned day's covert shooting in the true Suffolk style: the wide and windy heaths where the rabbits bobbed and the stone curlew whistled . . . the dark fir-wood with its ghostly aisles of reddened trunks at Brandon Hills. One half-expected to see a roe-deer tread lightfoot to the wood's edge and stand, poised, like a ballet dancer. For there are roe in these wide woods, more and more of them each year. They will increase as the Forestry Commission plantations grow and spread, and the red deer may increase with them. There are one or two lonely old red stags and shy does at large on these heaths, escaped from private parks. May they increase to add beauty and interest to what will, ere long, be Britain's greatest forest area.

One remembers too the long, cold wait in the ride in Warren Wood. White trees in front and bushes spangled with frost. The deadly snow-silence till there comes the far tap-tap of beaters' sticks. The first, high pigeons skirmishing overhead against the frosty blue. A jay, slipping out, shrilly, a coloured ragamuffin. Two tawny owls who flapped out of dark firs like slightly scandalized witches. Rabbits slipping across the ride before the gun could touch the shoulder, and a hare who came lolloping over the pine-needles, sat down a yard or two away, and gazed at one with great hazel eyes in which was no fear but a startled curiosity. So when she did make up her feather mind that all that tapping behind meant no good, and that the motionless figure in front was harmless, and leapt in sudden fright across the snowy ride, she went unharmed and unshot. Not all the pleasure of shooting lies in shooting.

Then came the pheasants. High cocks and sliding, low hens. Cocks who burst upward most gloriously, and cocks who nipped round holly-bushes and glided on down-bent wings, noiselessly, across just that precise part of the ride to which one was not looking. Cocks who were hit smack in the beak as they should be, and thumped down through branches in a floating cascade of feathers and an upflung spout of snow.

A right and left at jays which was most spectacular, and a clean miss at a dodging woodcock which was inexcusable.

Sun and snow on beech-trunks, a lone cock pheasant coming high and fast, tail going like a pump-handle against the light blue. Hares streaking past, ears flat, going like racehorses, and rabbits who galloped quietly down runways in the snow and sat up and looked at one, noses twitching.

Carrion crows beating across the Icknield Way in the cold sun, and the Way itself, that highway of the Ancient Britons, more ancient than Rome, dipping and rolling its secret, ancient path across the heath and under the flanks of dark and secret woods. Straight as a sword and lonely as night is that ancient road of the tribes. It knows only the warrener with his slinking lurcher; the keeper with his gun; the poacher, sly with purse-nets and snares; the travelling tinker with his clattering cart and unkempt long-dog, and the villager homing to West Stow from his day's work on the heath farms. It is a road of the hare and the rabbit, of the shrill jay and the watchful magpie. It knows the hobby hawk's grace and the windy sweep of the kestrel. The great goat-like eyes of the stone curlew see its secret passengers in the dawn. It is no road of this age or of our people, that timeless trackway of a far, forgotten Britain.

I walked it with a beater who wore a coachman's coat, and as we beat the outer heath to Wordwell Covert, where the hares were lying in the warm pine needles, he lamented " the days of the lord " when all this estate was well kept and well keepered, when hares were shot by the cartload and pheasants by the thousand. " Not that Mr Olding ain't a very good gentleman, but he can't rear none in war-time and this here Forestry Commission puts more and more men out o' work in the villages. We have two warreners to do the work of nine or a dozen. When Lord Cadogan was here there was fourteen keepers an' boys and a dozen warreners an' for ever o' work on the estate an' good pay too. But this here Forestry only employs nine warreners in peace-time. It just puts men out o' jobs and land out o' cultivation.

" Look at Mildenhall now. When old Sir Henry Bunbury had the estate he ran hundreds of pigs and had dozens of men and boys to look after 'em on heathland which the Forestry just lets lie idle. But them Bunburys are gone an' we miss 'em. Guv-mint ain't a good boss for no man."

We came down to Leechmere Cottages, that low, flint row of cottages all set in a line, utterly alone in the great heath, out of sight of road or man—each with its garden wired against the hordes of

rabbits, its communal wall, its individual yelping dog in a barrel, tits and robins in the gardens, washing frozen stiff on the line, and tiny windows, no more than a foot square, peering out from the back walls like slit eyes, half closed against the bitter north-easters. A man who would live in Leechmere, the heath hamlet of four cottages, must needs have the lonely soul of a fur-trapper, the ascetic philosophy of a Hebridean crofter.

Snowmisty hollows and beech-trees crowned the rises, their trunks white on one side, black where the snow had thawed and green in the sun. In far shallow valleys the great bustard ran in droves when Pitt was Premier, and on far slopes great woods lay like thunderclouds above flinty pits where the neolith once knapped his flint arrows and chipped the axehead that was his weapon against urus and sabre-tooth. To-day a wandering peregrine on his lordly foray, golden-plover keening under the stars, the horned owl snoring in the wood, and perchance a lone red stag limned against the murky red of a winter sunset—those are the wild ones of the hidden places.

The beaters came out of the wood and filed off up the sandy track towards North Stow. I watched them, their faces and plain ways. For these village men who, on a day a week in winter, forsake plough and bakehouse, horse-team and forge, back garden and inn parlour, and "go a-brushin'" are the pith of England. They know the hidden ways of the woods, the thin tracks on the heath, sand-pit and flint-pit, barrow and lonely pine. They know the rough hollow where the stream starts and the lake where the duck nest. They are of all English time and all history. Even their guttural cries as they plough through the snowy wood and tap-tap the tree-trunks are like gutturals of the neolith. In their veins runs, as like as not, the blood of the old sheep-stealers and deer-slayers, the commoners of the heaths and the rough woodmen of Tudor forests. I would rather by far walk and talk with them any day than with the effulgent City man gone rustic.

One old man, with a Palmerstonian pippin face, in a full-skirted, snuff-coloured greatcoat with a velvet collar, talked of Culford as had done the beater half an hour before.

"Lord Cadogan did a lot o' good to us here," said he. "Grew hundreds of acres of corn—ten sacks of wheat to an acre and seven sacks of barley. Now Mr Olding is the only one what grows a corn crop. Those Forestry people waste land and labour. Old Squire Duval had the place fifty year ago, an' he grew good crops

too an' for ever o' game. West Stow Hall was on the place then—a rare, nice, old hall too, hundreds o' years old, an' so is Wamil Hall, but that hev a ghost, they say. A Lady Summun or other. She walk!"

We walked up a broad ride through young, growing firs, and in the midst was an enormous 'G.R.' planted in young beeches a foot high to tell men of the future that this was, in truth, the King's Forest.

"Ah! Used to be 'E.R.,'" said the old man, "till that young Royalty gave up the job an' His Majesty took over. Then they changed it. Had to replant."

Jack joined us for lunch at North Stow, brisk, ruddy, cheery. They were hanging up the game in the great game-larder, with its brick floor, oak-beamed high roof, dairy coolness, and racks on which hung glowing cocks, great bouncing hares with black-tipped ears, French partridges brilliantly barred and English ones in sober grey and brown, woodcock with liquid eyes, and jays, insolent in death. It was a scene for a Dutch painter.

Lunch was a merry, riotous affair. We drank toasts and ate a vast game-pie. We stuffed hot potatoes into the vast trouser-seat of Charles Follett, that amiable gourmand, while Tommy Miles recaught the vasty trout of Hebridean yester-years and Harry Lambert, that shrewd ruddy-faced fox-catcher and pheasant-shooter who looks like an eighteenth-century coaching squire, carved and waited and buttled with the air of a Manetta and saw that none fainted. Which—since he had risen at 4.30 that morning, had been on the canter all day, and was taking a train to the Cotswolds to hunt the fox next morning—was no mean *tour de force*.

I went back that night to Newmarket, where, in a nostalgic moment, I decided to stay in the town of my birth for a day and stayed in the end for a week.

In the Rutland, that great and spacious inn with its faintly ducal memories, its prints and photographs of Edward VII and the Duchess of Montrose, of Lily Langtry and Fred Archer, of Admiral Rous and George Payne, I anchored myself in a bedroom with roses on the walls and an aura of dead duchesses.

It is on the site of part of the old palace of Charles II, that hallowed inn which was once called the Ram. And through the doors of the Ram, those great double doors which still look hopefully up the Bury Road as if awaiting an invisible coach with ten atop and six inside, the turkeys in the boot and the yard of tin blowing

"Down the Road," and the hoofs clip-clopping—well, through those great double doors on a day two hundred years ago, or it may be more or less, there dashed at top speed a curricle drawn by four terrified red stags and driven by a windy-faced, raw-boned nobleman who loved Newmarket, as all proper men of heart and spirit have loved her down the ages.

He was that eccentric Earl of Orford who was one of the greatest coursing men of all history. And Lord Orford, being a Walpole and something more than a bit of an original, liked to take the Newmarket air in his curricle with his team of stags.

It was unfortunate that day that a pack of foxhounds should have crossed his line. What a tow-rowing and a rare fling of music there was when down went the muzzles to ground, up went the sterns and the jolly chorus woke the rooks and ravens on the lonely heath. They hunted him down from the top of Bury Hill, the stags flying like the wind, wheels bumping, carriage swaying, stones flying, Lord Orford crouched and taut with the reins in his great red hands and, I dare swear, an unholy joy in his eye.

In at the doors of the Ram dashed the swaying curricle, and the ostler slammed them on the noses of the pack.

Kent, the architect, was the designer of the Rutland, and he, be it noted, was the grandfather of that Kent who was trainer to Lord George Bentinck.

I went up at half-past six that night to Queensberry Lodge, to do stables with 'Chub' Leach, a boyhood friend and son of that Grand Old Man of Newmarket, Felix Leach, who is still spruce, immaculate, hearty, and healthy at seventy-four. He owns, moreover, one of the best collections of cock-fighting spurs and 'bygones' in England, and a gallery of pictures which includes a superb Sartorius. "Stables" on a winter night is a memory unique—the dark yard, snow-rimmed, crispness of straw underfoot, the bobbing gleam of the lantern as door after door is opened by a stable-lad to the black night, and, within, luminous-eyed yearlings whose lovely limbs and satin coats may one day win the thunder of the crowd at Ascot or on the Heath.

There they are, one after another, sons and grandsons of Colombo and the Tetrarch, of Hyperion and River Prince, some with the blood of Ladas and St Simon, going back perhaps to the immortal Beeswing, the mighty Voltigueur and Eclipse, the darling of the gods. At each sleek head stands a diminutive 'lad,' who may be anything from a grizzled, wizened oldster of sixty to a mere pink

tot of fourteen. As the lovely heads turn and the soft eyes gleam in the light, as hoofs rustle in the straw and muscles ripple under coats of silk, you wonder if this or that of the lordly ones may not one day win the Derby or bring home the Gold Cup when the world has gone back to the good gay days again and we can rattle down to Epsom or tool up the hill to Ascot in a coach behind a well-matched team with, perhaps, Bert Barley handling the ribbons and Harry Love waking the sweet air of June with "Down the Road."

I wondered, as we walked from box to box, how many buried skeletons of hope defeated and of ambition unfulfilled burned in the hearts of those tiny, respectful men and boys whose whole life and soul is centred on the care of a horse and the urge to win a classic race. There, but for the grace of God, or more likely the ill-judgment of the man himself, was a frustrated Fred Archer, an incipient Gordon Richards, a muted Fordham. Stable-boys live in a little world of their own, far from the ordinary ways of men, their ambitions known only to themselves. To them, brought up perhaps in a northern slum or on a Yorkshire farm or in a Suffolk cottage, the inside of a Newmarket stable was a youthful lodestar, the Open Sesame to a silk jacket. One day they dreamed there would be the thunder of hoofs and the thunder of the crowd, the flash past the post, the numbers going up and the owner leading in the winner amid the smiles of women, the cheers of men. One in a hundred reaches half of that youthful goal.

We went on to the Craven Club, met and talked with a few, and then to the New Subscription Rooms, which is in, but not of, the Jockey Club Rooms. And there were Basil Jarvis and brother Jack, who are of the Royal Family of Newmarket, most hospitable of men; and Walter Earl, dapper and quick as a diamond; Stanley Smallwood, quiet and unobtrusive, but a rare judge of a man or a horse; Bobby Jones, the jockey; and a score of others—all with that clean, open-air cut about them and boyish zest in life which is the hall-mark of the true Newmarket man. Live in Newmarket and you will die young at a hundred.

We dined, Basil Jarvis and I, and talked of that dead but by no means forgotten scamp and lovable man, Robert Standish Sievier. Bob Sievier was a conscienceless Corinthian, a gentleman who betrayed his gentle blood, a rogue and a rascal—but he had a charm which few men and no women could resist, a defiance of law and convention which was almost a chivalry and an insouciance which

in a foreigner would have been insufferable, in an Englishman was a miracle.

There was the night when he rang Basil Jarvis and said, "Did you get my letter? I sent it by hand. Very urgent. Do send a reply by the boy. I've just sold my villa in the South of France and I'll meet the cheque on the day." Basil had just come in from stables. It was dark, and the letter lay unopened. He opened it—a request for a hundred pounds immediately and a post-dated cheque to cover it, dated the thirty-first of September. He sent the hundred pounds by hand. When the cheque was presented it came back—with the bank's reminder that there were only thirty days in September. He never saw his hundred pounds, although he saw Bob Sievier many times thereafter.

But one night there came another telephone-call. It was Bob Sievier again.

"I've just posted you a little keepsake, Basil. You'll get it in the morning. I'd like you to keep it. I'm not for this world much longer. 'Night, old boy!"

Next morning there came a crocodile cigar-case, gold-mounted, with the monogram 'R.S.S.' in gold, the famous case which had given away so many Larranagas and Coronas. That night's papers told of the sudden death of Robert Standish Sievier, a man cast in a Carolean mould. There was also, let us recall whimsically, the time when he won undying local popularity by sending a joint of Christmas beef to each one of the poor of Newmarket. The butcher's bill remained unpaid for many a day!

I went next day to Stanley House and there, in the snow and brilliant sun, saw Lord Derby's string, some of the best blood in the world, come in from the tan-ring while Walter Earl went over them like a hawk, point and sire and pedigree, back to the dimmest sire of a century ago.

I lunched with Basil and Mr Sallis, who farms largely and well round Shippea Hill and Mildenhall, and I told them of Stanley Hemsby, who owns and farms nearly four thousand acres round Woodditton and had just told me that he had paid £96,000 in Excess Profits Tax since war began. How can a farmer possibly restore fertility to his war-exhausted land under such a crushing burden of tax?

And then to the Jockey Club, where I promised myself an hour among some of the best horse portraits in England. But it was so cold that even the urbane Mr Brian Marriott nearly froze in his

ciceronic tracks. So we looked at the committee-room and a few of the better pictures in the dining-room and passage, and later, sat by the fire and talked of this club which is, of all clubs, unique and most royally all-powerful in the empire of the horse.

" This," said young Mr Marriott, with an invisible flourish as we started off, " is the committee-room."

" The death cell ? " said I.

" Well," says he, with the slightly deprecating smile of one near to the executioner, " I should feel that way if I had to stand in that little horseshoe and face them at that table."

It is a demurely austere room, most graciously Georgian, with tall windows full of light. The horseshoe table in the middle is of eighteenth-century mahogany, and the Sheraton chairs, on which sit the committee when a complainant or defaulter is before them, are of the days of Pitt. The Adam mantelpiece is a most lootable piece, framed in walls of buff stamped leather, panelled and studded with brass nails.

" Padded," said young Mr Marriott. " Padded with two inches of cotton-wool. Not a sound gets out."

With which inquisitorial remark he pointed to the curtains, stiff antique silk, pale oyster and yellow, which crimped and crackled in the fingers. " Two or three hundred years old and worth any amount of money. Lord Jersey gave them to the Club. From Osterley Park."

The Jockey Club rooms at Newmarket are like that—a blend of antiquity and austerity, of grace and simplicity, an emblem of the indefinable powers of this aristocratic and utterly autocratic body, which, having no legal status and all the power imaginable, has made English racing first in the world, unmatchable and unimpeachable.

What, who, and why is the Jockey Club ? The non-racegoer may well ask. For that matter, if you asked nineteen out of twenty racegoers they could not tell you. They would say, dimly, that the Jockey Club holds all but the power of life and death in racing, that it can break a man or make a man, that it controls vast wealth and embodies awful majesties, that to be ' warned off ' by it is tantamount to being told to go into the next room, shut the door, find the revolver in the second drawer and politely use it. That is all. There knowledge stops and superstition creeps in.

The Jockey Club to-day consists of five hundred members. They are elected by ballot at meetings held during the spring. They pay

a ten-pound subscription, and this entitles them to free use of all stands and enclosures at Newmarket for themselves and their wives and daughters. The three Stewards, who this year (1946) are Lord Hamilton of Dalzell, Sir Edward Hanmer, Bart., and Sir Humphrey de Trafford, Bart., are elected each third year, and the Senior Steward always nominates his successor subject to the approval of the Annual General Meeting. The power of the Stewards is almost absolute, but it has no legal status or backing. It has been challenged, but no one who ever did so found it worth while in the end.

The Jockey Club possesses a magnificent club-house and set of residential rooms at Newmarket, originally part of the old palace of Charles II. The rebuilt portion was burned down in the 'thirties, and the present building, a semi-classical red-brick pile of almost forbidding austerity, was erected from designs of that elegant and Georgian-minded architect, Professor A. E. Richardson.

It does not admit women to its highly esoteric membership, but it did once unbend so far as to offer that delightfully dignified Edwardian hostess, the late Mrs Montague Tharp, of Chippenham Park, honorary membership. Mrs Tharp accepted, and duchesses envied her. But there was a sting in the honey. Cynical men with unkind minds said that the Jockey Club had held out its hand not only because Mrs Tharp was a great lady of a sort now almost extinct and not only because she was the widow of that lovable and impressive squire, "Monty" Tharp, who was host to kings and a king in Newmarket, but because her property included the Lime-kilns. And the Lime-kilns, as every small stable-boy knows, is two hundred and twelve acres of the finest galloping turf in the world. With the adjoining Water Hall and the Railway Field, it amounts to close on six hundred acres. They say that it has subterranean springs beneath the chalk, which means that in the droughtiest of dry summers the grass is always green, the turf springy, and the larks are singing above the Lime-kilns. The Jockey Club had its use for a nominal rent of only a shilling a year!

But when old Mrs Tharp died her successors found, as all squires find, that death duties make the responsible ownership of agricultural land almost impossible. So the Lime-kilns were sold, for £60,000 or so, they say in Newmarket, or near enough a hundred pounds an acre, which must make it some of the most valuable grassland in England.

To-day the Jockey Club probably owns about seven to eight thousand acres in Newmarket and round about it, a fair slice indeed

of the twelve thousand acres or so which are there devoted to racing and bloodstock breeding. Lord Derby owns about three thousand acres, possibly more, and Lord Ellesmere has a large estate at Stetchworth—most of which, however, is purely agricultural.

The Jockey Club's land includes the whole of the Heath of just over two thousand acres, all Bury Hill and Warren Hill, much land towards, and in, Exning, including the Hamilton and other studs, the Golf Links, and most of the famous Devil's Ditch, that prehistoric earthwork which the Iceni threw up when Rome was a mere whisper on the Mediterranean shore. This property is invaluable. It would be as impossible to set a definite sale value on it as it would be to value St Paul's Cathedral or Westminster Abbey. Such things are unique and irreplaceable. But if we assess the Newmarket landed property as worth two hundred and fifty pounds an acre—*i.e.*, five times the value of good local farmland—we shall not be far out. Add to that a likely hundred thousand pounds for the magnificent collection of pictures, silver, gold plate, and relics, and we have an all-in figure for land and movables of about two million one hundred thousand pounds, to which the Jockey Club premises would probably add another hundred thousand—a grand total, and a conservative one, of two million two hundred thousand pounds. The pictures include Stubbses, Sartoriuses, Herrings and Ferneleys and Lynwood Palmers, all of which are of considerable value. There are also many by Emil Adam, who, though a capable and faithful horse artist, has not yet attained any considerable values. The same applies to the Harry Halls.

Captain Frank Siltzer, the historian of Newmarket, has very fairly defined the functions of the Jockey Club as " the framing of regulations, the settling of disputes, and the organization of racing policy in general." Those were the functions of the King in the days when Charles II kept court at Newmarket and rode in races against his own subjects—as, indeed, he did against Henry Jermyn, who built and dwelt in my own old house away below the Newmarket uplands in the steaming fens. More than one record tells of Charles being appealed to as final judge, as when, in 1882, a match between Mr Bellingham's horse and Mr Roe's horse ended in a dispute on which hung so many thousands of pounds that it was referred to the King, who, at 9 P.M., settled it, after much disputation, as having been won by " a foote and a halfe."

In Queen Anne's time old periwigged Tregonwell Frampton, a

Dorset squire of Frampton Court, near Dorchester, was made "Master of the Running Horses" and exercised the Royal prerogative at Newmarket, while Anne was busy founding Ascot and hunting with the Royal Buckhounds in Windsor Forest. Tregonwell was an autocrat and a wise one, a great man in his day and a figure for all time in racing history.

Then in or about 1730 an Association of noblemen and gentlemen of repute was formed to assume the mantle of Tregonwell. They met at the Star and Garter in Pall Mall, and called themselves the Jockey Club. They met also at the Thatched House in St James's Street, at the Clarendon in Bond Street, at Hyde Park Corner, and then in Old Burlington Street.

Finally the Coffee Rooms on the site of the old royal palace in Newmarket were taken in or about 1752 on a fifty years' lease. Before half of the lease was up Mr 'Jockey' Vernon bought the premises and the Jockey Club eventually became its own landlord.

Since that day it has become recognized as the final arbiter on all things connected with racing. Its fiats and decisions are the model of law to all other race-meetings in Britain. If you are "warned off the Turf" at Newmarket by the Jockey Club, who *own* the turf there, you may as well give up riding or training anywhere else.

It has, of course, been challenged, notably in 1827 at Cambridge Assizes, when the Duke of Portland brought an action against a Mr S. Hawkins for trespass after he had been warned off the Heath by the Jockey Club for having used unbecoming language to Lord Wharncliffe on the Heath. It was stated in evidence that the Jockey Club had been "invested with the proprietorship of these grounds since 1752 as tenants of the Duke of Portland."

The first traceable official order of the Club was issued in 1758; it compelled all riders to weigh when they came in from running in a race on pain of being "dismissed," and was signed by Lord March and others. It appeared in *Heber's Racing Calendar*, which would more than amuse the modern racegoer, for not only does it give the horses, weights, jockeys, and the rest, but it advertises Mr Heber's own "mild York River tobacco," sporting pictures, and other oddments.

Finally, in 1773, the Jockey Club authorized Mr James Weatherby to become "Keeper of the Match Book at Newmarket." Since that First of May the Weatherby family have most admirably represented the Jockey Club in all to do with the Turf, the stud-books, and racing calendars.

Jockey Club investigations into complaints, scandals, and other serious matters are held in secret in that leather-walled, padded room with the horseshoe table and the ancient silk curtains. Any sort of expert is likely to be called if the facts warrant it. In the famous Tarragona case private betting-books were examined under the microscope and handwriting experts were called in.

Stewards of the Jockey Club have varied from the most autocratic to the absurdly lenient. When I was a boy at Newmarket three of them were so apt to turn a blind eye to the odd habits of the American jockeys and trainers, who had then come over, that they were called " the three blind mice." One thing which is prohibited is clocking a single horse over a given distance. Yet one American trainer, a gum-chewing, beetle-browed, atavistic-looking giant of six foot three with a singular inability to pronounce English as it is intelligibly spoken, persisted in doing so. Finally the matter was reported to the Stewards, and he was hauled up before the horseshoe table. The three Stewards, peaceable men who liked a quiet life, contemplated the scowling, near-Neanderthal type before them, chewing remorselessly.

" Er! Good morning, Mr So-and-so," said the Senior Steward.

" Mawnin'," grunted the monster, between chews.

" Charming weather for the time of year."

" Dandy," mouthed the neolith.

" I think we look like having a good racing season," put in another Steward.

" Mebbe," came between mastications. The third Steward coughed delicately, and conversation languished. It looked as though the offender was about to turn and make for the door, unadmonished.

So Messrs Weatherby's representative gently but firmly reminded the Stewards of the offence and more or less intimated that it was not much good the Club's representatives keeping their eyes open for abuses if the Stewards did not support them. So the offender was told that he mustn't do it again and mountainously withdrew.

" For God's sake don't bring that fellow here again," expostulated one of the Stewards. " I thought he was going to eat us! "

Lord George Bentinck and Admiral Rous, the two men who did more than any others to give the Turf the high and irreproachable standards which are its greatest asset to-day, are naturally pillars of Jockey Club history, and Lord George's mighty brass telescope and a painting of the Admiral's frigate, *Pique*, which he brought safely,

though rudderless, across the Atlantic in appalling weather, are two of the Club's relics, with Fred Archer's whip and a hoof of Eclipse.

Admiral Rous raised the revenue of the Club from a mere £3000 a year to £18,000 a year, a figure which has increased immensely since his death in 1877, when he was virtually sole judge in all Turf matters. His position and power were alike unique, and although he raised the opposition of some, notably Sir Joseph Hawley, he died honoured by all and leaving the Turf a hundred and ten times healthier and cleaner than it had ever been before.

Lord George Bentinck is chiefly remembered for his exposure of the Running Rein scandal, when a horse of that name was entered for the Derby under the wrong age and won it though a four-year-old.

The case caused such commotion and Lord George was so popular with all classes that a large public subscription fund was raised as a testimonial to his public-spiritedness and the Jockey Club passed him a special vote of thanks. He accepted the vote, but passed the money over to the Jockey Club to be the basis of a fund for trainers and jockeys in reduced circumstances. The fund still exists to-day, and has helped many a needy sportsman.

Lord George eventually gave up all his Turf interests, although they were near to his heart, because he considered that the cause of agriculture demanded all his time and attention in the House of Commons. History is likely to repeat itself—without any Lord George Cavendish Bentinck to take up the cudgels for the farmer.

Once the Jockey Club indirectly helped to send a man to the scaffold. In 1809 certain racehorses were poisoned by drinking water from troughs belonging to J. Stevens, a stable-keeper. The Jockey Club at once offered a hundred guineas for the detection and conviction of the poisoner. Two years later four horses belonging to Dick Prince, a trainer, were poisoned. Arsenic was found in the water. The Jockey Club increased its reward to five hundred guineas. This did the trick.

Soon afterwards one Daniel Dawson—a tout, once a groom, who lodged in the High Street—was arrested at Brighton, brought up at Marlborough Street, and committed for trial at Cambridge Assizes. He was found guilty and condemned to death, and although Lord Foley, the owner of the poisoned horses, did all he could to save the man's life, the Home Secretary was rock-like and Dawson was hanged. It was a capital offence to poison horses and cattle maliciously under George I.

Bishop, Dawson's accomplice, had turned King's evidence and revealed how a plot had been laid in the Ring to lay against the poisoned horses.

To-day (1946) Mr Marriott, the agent to the Jockey Club, who is a sort of ambassador and plenipotentiary extraordinary, his scholarly son "Mr Brian," and Mr Reeve, the Secretary, who is also Secretary to the Cambridgeshire War Agricultural Committee, keep the wheels slowly turning in a Newmarket which can boast of not much more than a score of trainers, whose big houses are shuttered, whose Jockey Club is a silent museum of lordly rooms and lovely paintings, and whose 'Chambers' wait for the day when a King of England will again lay his head on its pillows and all England can afford to go out and play at, or watch, the Sport of Kings. The day will come.

XIII. THE HALL OF THE STONE BELL

In the High Hills of Mid-Wales—Llangurig and the Lloyd-Verneys—On Welsh Farms and Farmers—On Ravens, Buzzards, Sheep, and Men—Snowed up on a Mountain

> Oft when grim days of February gird
> The chastened brooks with iron have I heard . . .
> . . . the pairing ravens climb
> In widening circles, while the curlew pours
> That liquid laughter which shall wake the moors
> When snows are gone. . . .
>
> FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG, *The Island*

THE HOUSE IS LONG AND STONE AND WARM. IT SITS ON A HIGH and grassy shelf of rock with its eye to the tall hills above the sweet head-waters of the young Wye. It is shepherded by mountain ash and sycamore, sycamores with grey-silver trunks which hold the moss, and scrawny branches that make aureoles of twiggy beauty above the chimney-pots.

Because the house is part stone and part black-and-white, and sits with so womanly a comfort in its ash and sycamore with a great darksome cluster of huge Scots pines away at its feet to the right and a hanging cloud of most ancient larches on the hill at its back, you feel that it is the mother of this hidden valley where the Wye is young. And you would be right, for there was a hall-house on this shelf of Clochfaen when the Lloyds of Clochfaen, who were of that noble clan, the Princes of Dyferth, were lords of valley and mountain as far as eye could see or a shepherd could walk in two days of hill-going.

There was then, in those old days, they tell you, a great stone bell which hung in the tower of that four-square stone fortalice with its battlements and tiny windows, its great oaken door and inner courtyard, the old fortress-hall of Clochfaen or Stone Bell. The bell clanged its hollow notes on the valley wind, or boomed through the mountain mist when war was afoot or the lord of Clochfaen demanded his men in force.

That old square fortalice has gone. The rock flowers of the stone garden bloom where its walls once stood. And the Lloyds have gone, and the Verneys who followed them, and most of the

wide lands which once covered more than ten thousand acres are scattered, and half the heart and soul has gone out of the village. That is always the case when a good squire is forced to sell.

Something warm and human and protective, a guiding force, an element of good friendship and guardianship, goes out of a country district when 'the big estate' is broken up, the farms are thrown on the market. Then the land speculators force the prices up, and men are obliged to buy their farms and cottages on mortgage at high rates or get out. Even if they buy with ready cash the spirit of the place is still different. The old familiar order, with its settled ways, has gone. Its known customs are dead. The men of the estate who played each his own distinctive part, and were good friends and part of the individual life of the place, are scattered.

The steward or agent, who knew every leak in the roof or smoking chimney, every broken gate and stopped drain, has gone. With him goes that general sense that, although all may not be perfect, at least an overseeing eye knows of the imperfections. The estate carpenter, a homely man with a blue shrewd eye and grizzled hair, a man who smelt of chips and sawdust and warm tar, is no more. You will not see him coming up the lane on a spring morning to mend a gate or put in a few new tiles. And Lovell, the head keeper, that green-coated, kindly autocrat with his snuffling spaniels, his wise old retriever, his musical puppies, and his gun—he, alike the terror and secret god of small boys, has sought a fresh kingdom in an alien county. So it is with them all. Alf, the head cowman at the Home Farm, is away to a far shire, and his cheerful face and wise 'cow-doctoring' are a lost memory. The woodman has gone, and the woods are foul. The head gardener, a dry Scot, has gone back to Scotland, and the vinery, the greenhouses, the potting-sheds, and the warm walls are cold and dead. The life has gone from them, and the warmth and the new young things.

So it is always when an old place is broken up. Again and again the tragedy has been repeated these last thirty years. Lloyd George and his 1910 Budget, his class-conscious, bitter legislation, began it. Death duties on sons fallen in battle have added a cynical toll. Die for your country and your country will force your ancestral home into the melting-pot to pay the price of your valour. [1]

Not death duties but an over-generous purse forced the Verneys out of Clochfaen. When a squire rebuilds the church and half the

[1] This manifest injustice which ruined so many estates was, tardily, rectified by the late Government.

cottages at top prices, and rents fall because the Government of the day allows cheap foreign food to swamp the farmer, something must crack. So the Verneys went and are lamented.

Up to 1946 my sister-in-law, who is a Scot and a New Zealander, lived at Clochfaen with four thousand acres of hill shooting poached by man and dog, ravaged by raven and buzzard, fox and polecat, and four and a half miles of the Wye—its singing shallows and silver beeches, its green and sliding runs, its voice that chatters in the night and whispers in the dawn. There are still salmon and trout in spite of the wily Welsh, who hide their rods and long gaffs in the field drains under the road for use in the moonlit hours.

I like the Welsh. I like their courtesy, their quick, shy charm, their bright and lucid eyes, their flowing, untrue tongue like a mountain brook after rain, their ebullient, almost foreign, gestures, and their fierce religion. Though they will diddle me for a shilling, I know they will not cheat me of a pound. Their little hill-farms, hid in the mists and the lichened, scrawny trees, are of grey stone and blue slates, crouched on the breast of hills more ancient than the Alps and Himalayas. Their hills are as old as the world itself. For these Welsh hills were upthrown in the first, fierce cooling of the earth's surface, æons before the mastodon. Time and the wet eyes of heaven have smoothed their sharp crags and jagged ridges to the warm contours of a woman's breasts, the slow swell of long sea-waves.

And who knows that these dark, quick Welsh with the singing tongues of angels and the fierce eloquence of Gauls are not as old as the first men who dwelt on these ancient hills? They were here, the little dark hillmen, long ere England was forged, before Dane and Jute, Saxon and Norman, blended their blood and made the English.

The Welsh farmer is hardy and industrious, a good doer like his own sheep and mountain ponies. His methods may not be spectacularly modern, but they are suited to the country and, by and large, they get the most out of the land and put a proper return of dung back. Lime is only just beginning to be used on many pastures which could have done with it years ago, and surface draining could be improved on. But fence-laying is a lovely and commendable art on most farms, roads are not too bad, and buildings are warm, dry, and comfortable in most cases.

The average stone farmhouse, with its slate roof, its white-harled walls and sturdy stone buildings, is a little pastoral settlement which

might have come straight out of Tusser. Within, the houses are usually spotless, particularly the dairies, which are of that old-fashioned immaculateness which one remembers in the farmhouses of one's youth, before earnest and hybrid professors and publicists had begun to yammer about hygiene.

Many of the older farmhouses and cottages have pebble-paved floors which are inlaid in the most attractive and artistic patterns.

Sheep, the mainstay, are mainly Welsh, in which I include the old Plynlimmon breed, Clun Valley and Kerry crosses. Hardy, active, and good doers, they can live on the bark of a tree, 'up the side of a house,' and fight a dog off with their forefeet! One old three-legged ewe who lives all the year up on a 1700-feet hill comes down each lambing-time, jumps the Clochfaen Hall garden fences, and lambs comfortably and warmly under the rhododendrons with a spring to minister to her and flower-beds to ravage.

Shearing-time is a patriarchal festival. When it is all over Mr Davies, of Tyn-y-Maes, that jolly, fat man who typifies his kind, will give a shearing party to perhaps a hundred workers, farmers, wives, children, and neighbours with food and drink and song for the gods. They will all be there—steward, spectacled Willy Jones, the dairy farmer from across the river, John Meredith, the shepherd, Grover, the head tractorman. the Griffithes, Edwardes, Hughes, Evanses, and all the Cymric clan. They come from the village and from forgotten farms and solitary cottages that lie hidden in the mists by spectral woods of witch-like trees, where long beards of lichens hang green-grey like the flowers of dead men. They come by sheep-walk and fox-track, down from the heather ridges where the grouse crow, by the lone quarry where the ravens nest in a sheer cliff face, up the valley by pools where the salmon leap, and from clefts in the ancient hills that lie hidden from the sight of roads and men and open to the eye of God.

It is a moving sight, that gathering of the godly and eloquent to thank God and man for the year's harvest of wool. The psalms rise up to the soft skies in a torrent of song, and the thankful prayers are blown on the summer wind.

Religious though they are, there is hardly a man or woman who does not believe in the Tylwyth Teg, the fairies. They will not tell you so, since they are not the Irish, a clamorous and vainglorious race for ever preening themselves and parading their wits. But when they walk on the mountain with the curling, creeping mists, when all the world is grey and soft, when they come to the old and

silver woods where the long lichens hang from spectral branches, when the rain seeps down in an endless veil, and when the white moon shines on the sliding river far below and the black quiet fir-wood behind, it is hard not to believe in the little people moving and dancing up there in the scrawny wood, or down by the brawling burn in the green moss " where the little green lanterns glow."

They will tell you of children spirited away " in the old days " by the fairies and returned by them long years after to the village when all who had known them were dead, save one old man or two. So no believing Welsh mother will leave her child alone under the branches of mountain ash, oak, or sycamore, for these are the fairies' trees.

They speak incantations in Welsh over sick animals, and put out honey and milk as their obeisance. And when it has gone in the morning who is there that will blame cat or dog ?

And if you do not believe these things go you to the Dulas Valley where a man told me that every house had its guardian pensioners of the small ones!

And, because five centuries ago, through that far ancestor Dr William Day, the Elizabethan Provost of Eton who was a descendant of Morgan Dee, a Welshman " ex Cambro Britannicus generosus," as old Norroy puts it in his grant of arms, perhaps because of the blood of that scholar who became Prince Bishop of Winchester, I go back every now and then to Wales, its rounded hills and singing valleys where the sheep rove and the ravens swing in slow, high circles.

So it was that I came on a January night from Newmarket to Clochfaen, set above the valley cup of Llangurig. The night was bitter-cold and the wind shrewd as a seeking witch. Snow lay on the hills. Winking stars and heavy cloud promised more. In the night it winnowed down like goose-feathers. By morn the great tits were knocking at the window, and a robin sat on the doorstep, and the hill sheep were in the garden. The snow was soft and deep, misty blue and dazzling. Gone was " the vacant wine-red moor," and, instead, a great, dazzling shoulder of glistening white on a hill that was old when Christ was born in Galilee.

The Wye was a blue snake among the white, a snake which curled by white cottages crouched under dark fir-woods, by pocket-handkerchief fields and bubbling springs which made green patches in the snow for springing snipe. The trees were crystal on the north side and black on the south. Carrion crows " cra-ed " from

the hedges. From the bleak valley of Tyn-y-Maes as I walked out, thigh-booted, came the far "Waak! Waak! Erk! Erk!" of a raven.

Sheep came leaping through the snow-drifts like ungainly antelope. Behind them, under the towering red trunks of the pines in Hall Wood, John Meredith, the shepherd, loomed, dog at heel, face and ears shrouded in a woman's grey wool scarf.

"Yes indeed! There are rafens. The rafens are on the look-out now for sick sheep. Why, 'twas in the last great frost in 'thirty-nine, the rafens got a sick ewe in those brambles below Clochfaen gardens, and sat on her back and picked right through her skull to the brains. Yes indeed! But we shot them in the Hall Wood in the spring.

"Rafens and buzzards and foxes—the place is alife with them since the keepers went. Perhaps, sir, you will shoot them down for us. For we haf no cartridges. They take the chickens and ducks and get our lambs in the spring, and the grouse are nearly all gone. So many buzzards there are."

I do not usually shoot birds of prey. I like them too well. But when I saw seven buzzards and four ravens in two days it was clear that reduction was overdue.

So we lay up that snowy evening in the Hall Wood, under the red cathedral pines, Soapey Sponge and I, hidden behind a great towering trunk at whose foot they had dug out a monstrous great dog fox not long before, after Lord Davis's hounds had roused him on far Voel, and hounds and footmen had hunted him over the mountain shoulder and through the brawling river. There was the earth mouth and the gaping pit they had dug down to his hiding-place.

Redly the late sun glowed through the red pines, and pink glowed the snow with an unreal, most fairy-like gleam. In the wood tiny firecrested wrens flitted like quick jewels. A nuthatch crept, woodpecker-like, up a giant bole, hungered for the last sow-beetle. On the river flats the sheep moved stiffly through the drifts and a heron rose, blue-grey, from a shallow and floated over the hill to some far, warm wood of firs. The snow fell, thinly, coldly. The cold stung the cheeks and bit the ears.

Down on the dimming river flats a faint humming came thinly, insistently. It was eerie, uncanny, that faint humming from the bowels of the earth, an other-world sound. The mind flew suddenly to old Welsh tales of the Tylwyth Teg, the fairy people,

to Pictish brochs on the Border by Hadrian's Wall, and to tales of the underground people who come out when all humans are asleep. It was chilling, that queer, insistent humming coming up to the silent wood, to the giant snow-laden pines in the cold red dusk. Ice forming! That was it. The Wye was freezing. Even those swift mountain waters were being bound by that Arctic cold.

Soapey, obedient on his cold seat in the snow, suddenly whimpered. Then they came—six, seven, eight—nine pigeons, their pink and grey breasts rosy in the dying sun, swinging into the warm dimness of the great pines.

The gun swung up. A double flash stabbed the falling snow. One bird crashed down through the pine-needles and hit the snow with a soft thud. The second towered straight up, swung into the wind, and glided down in a long plane to fall into the ash-belt by the top garden path, that path which they call, lightly, "Polts' Prowl" because of the poltergeist who, they say, has his habitation in its dark trees and ashes. Were not ash-trees always the abode of pagan spirits, and is not the mountain ash to this day a sacred tree in Wales? "The tree" and by no other name is it called, nor can it be cut down.

But I was after pigeons and not poltergeists. Soapey stood at the first, pounced, drew back, pounced again, mouthed it, and very, very gingerly picked it up. Then he dropped it, spitting woolly feathers. A pigeon is *not* the ideal first bird on which to train a young near-retriever. In the end he picked it, brought it with a wry but delighted face and much tail-wagging, and was rewarded with a pat which sent him scurrying for the next one into shoulder-deep drifts. The second pigeon was head down in the snow under an ash—dead as a doornail.

And then, suddenly far up, came that high, plaintive "Pee-you! Pee-you!" Across the valley against the white mountain shoulder two great birds swung in wide circles. The buzzards were coming in to roost. I was under the fox-earth pine in half a minute. Somehow I felt it was their pine, for a great, gaunt branch, high up, stuck out over the field, the sort of branch on which a buzzard will sit for hours, watching.

"Pee-you! Pee-you!" High up through the pine-needles a buzzard swung in on broad pinions. The last red of the sun glowed on its tawny breast. *Bang!* The great bird crashed through the top branches and fell like a huge tiger moth on the snow. Wings distended, shoulders hunched, talons outstretched, yellow eyes

blazing, it looked the spirit of death defiant. At the report the second, larger still, swung over a gap in the pine-tops and the next barrel knocked him sideways and sent him spinning in a long dive into the snipe marsh below the wood. I felt a murderer. There is something in hawk and falcon, eagle and owl, which strikes a responsive note in my barbaric breast. I like them all. But when chickens are taken from the garden, ducks plucked out of their pen, and tits, those friendly little window-tappers, and blackbirds massacred in the hedges it is time to call a stop.

Yet that buzzard was noble in its last defiance, clutching a huge fir-cone in one talon, the other clawing at me while the eyes flashed like topaz. Soapey, flushed with the triumph of his pigeon, rushed in to retrieve and was shooed off from a messy mauling in the nick of time. I took the fore-end off the gun, advanced, and clubbed the buzzard. It fell sideways, still fighting. I grabbed it by the legs, above the talons, and struck it again. And although that buzzard was not only winged, but shot through the body and clubbed on the skull, it was long a-dying. The physical resistance of these miniature eagles is amazing, their lung-power extraordinary. Long after the bird's skull was fractured and its eyes closed the powerful lungs rose and dilated the breasts.

The other, much bigger, I found behind a tussock in the snipe marsh, sore shot, but full of fight. It measured four feet from wing-tip to wing-tip. Three nights later I shot another and called a halt. It seemed as though chickens and honour alike were satisfied. Yet within a week I saw six more, and one came right into the sheep-fold where the magpies were sitting on the sheep's backs, picking off ticks in their hunger.

Next morning the river was frozen from bank to bank. The snipe springs were solid ice. Fields and woods were quiet with the quietness of the snow shroud. No cars could go on the mountain roads, no papers, coals, or bread could reach the house. Drifts on the hills were four feet deep. In the cattle-yard the crows sat on the fence and the magpies walked in at the barn door. Cattle huddled under walls of baled straw and steamed. Mountain ponies walked stiffly in the snow, their long tails trailing. A vast company of small birds gathered at our windows at noon and at tea and were fed. A robin came into the great hall and sat on the beams for warmth. A fox, who had kennelled in the rhododendrons, left his trail all through the garden, across the snipe meadows, and down to the river where he had fed on a carrion crow shot the night

before. In the larch-wood that night as I waited for pigeons the full moon cast devilish shadows, and the old tall wood seemed full of the far, inherited threat of wolves which once walked these hills.

Glyn Tildesley, of Llanidloes, told me the next day of twelve polecats seen hunting in a pack—polecats, not stoats—which is surely a momentous rare sight, and all the farmers and farm men went out with guns and dogs and took to the hills on a great tracking of foxes, and were caught in a blizzard at four in the afternoon and came home, plodding deeply and wearily, white in the ghastly moon and driving snow, with but one rabbit and no foxes. And England to me seemed far away, and I mourned for my East Coast and the chanting multitudes of the brent geese who would be in black clouds on Colne and Blackwater. And here was I, in this most superb of wildfowlers' winters, mewed up on a Welsh mountain-side!

There would be great curtains of fowl lifting and falling over Osea, and grey herds of curlew feeding up Coopers Creek. I could see, in my dream eye, our gallant old smack, the *Joseph and Mary*, riding at her anchor off Steeple Creek, ice jostling past the forefoot on the run of the tide, the river black and mottled with crackling floes, the far shore marshes a sheet of white, mast and stays glittering white, swaying against the stars. And down in the tiny cabin Alf and Cliff Claydon, those two grand fishermen-fowlers and natural gentlemen, frying bacon on the red stove, stirring black tea in the kettle. And outside the wheel and clamour of fowl, whistle of widgeon, cronking of brent geese, the hoarse quack of mallard, thin whistle of golden-eye, and high keening of the wind in the spars.

But there were no fowl in that high upper valley of the Wye in the foothills of old Plynlimmon. Only the ravens' croak and the long-horned owl beating the tussocky white fields, the fox prowling on the gorsey hillside, and the river humming under the white ice.

In the morning David John, who was boot-boy here to the Verneys in the old days, and is now handyman and general sea-anchor—he and I stood in the snow and sawed logs and talked of birds and beasts.

"I seen a polecat's tracks in the snow this morning," said David John. "To all the rabbit-holes he had been along the hill. There's a-many about here—and badgers too in the Bluebell Wood ayont the road to Marsh's Pool where that fat Mr Gibbings [1] will be living. An' two rafens up the hill, too—after dead sheep maybe."

[1] Robert Gibbings, the author of *Coming down the Wye*, a book to read.

" Meredith, the shepherd, says they nested in the Hall Wood a year or two ago, and they fired guns into the nest to kill the young ones but could not, so they cut the tree down," said I.

" Aye. An' a pair of the buzzards last summer nested there too—by the clearing. The two young birds would sit on the side of the nest an' look at me as I was choppin' the wood for the house. The nest is there now—big as a cart, too!

" There was a badger or two about here—good old chaps. They do no harm. I'm thinkin', though, the farmers say they roll in the oats and flatten them. But not very big badgers according to your English ones, I'm thinkin'."

" My wife picked up a dead one last spring, poisoned by a fool of a War Agricultural Pest Officer. He killed two dogs as well because he did not even know how to set traps for rats," said I. " It weighed forty-two pounds—a bit over the average."

" Ah, no! The Welsh badgers would not be so big," David John replied. " More like thirty pounds, I'm thinkin'. And the hares are only seven pounds to eight pounds in weight, too."

I contrasted them with Norfolk hares, which run from ten to twelve pounds, and Essex marsh hares, which are usually about nine to ten pounds. Food makes all the difference.

That night I stood in the moon under the ragged mass of the buzzard's nest in a dead, pale pine on the edge of a clearing. There was a great flat platform of boughs and sticks, perhaps four feet long and a foot and a half wide, with a natural canopy of flat twigs above it, a bare, jutting bough as a look-out post, and a clear view over the valley and the falling slope of the wood, with tall firs and larch behind to shield it from the prevailing mountain wind. No site could have been better chosen.

The ravens were making hollow echoes up the white mystery of the Plynlimmon Pass. " Pruk! Pruk! "—and then, after a few seconds, a deep guttural, " Arqk! Arqk! " followed, as they swung out over the white and empty valley, with a distinct " Waak! Waak! Qu-aark!—Argk! " It is a cold and bloody sound, especially when you hear it in a lonely valley between ancient mountains in a dusk of snow and bitter, biting frost—so cold that the twigs cracked in the stillness.

I shot a pigeon out of a dozen as they swung into roost, and his crop was stuffed with turnip-tops from some half-starved little hill field.

And then Meredith came through the snow with his small, black,

wolfish bitch with her grey muzzle and demure airs, and we stood under a hedge with the shuffling sheep all about, their smell strong on the frosty night, and talked of land and sheep.

These valley lands about Llangurig are not good, even the best of them. Ten to twelve pounds an acre for the lowland, and ten shillings to a pound for hill, was my guess and Meredith said it was a fair guess. The fields are small—two to six acres—with an odd ten- or twelve-acre piece which seems a prairie by comparison. They are shallow-ploughed and full of stones, but the soil is not bad. Were it only well drained it would be half as much again. The farms are big. Davies of Tyn-y-Maes, at the foot of the Clochfaen drive, farms and owns 999 acres, and many another man farms two and three thousand acres. But the king of them is Captain Bennett-Evans, up the Plynlimmon Pass. He bought six thousand acres for eight thousand pounds, or eight thousand acres for six thousand pounds—no one seems sure which—from "our great Sir Watkin" as they call that Welsh landowner of the old school, Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn of Wynnstay, who is probably the last of the old Welsh landed gentlemen to keep his private pack of hounds. He owns a small principality.

Well, Captain Bennett-Evans, being a man of resource, then bought two railway carriages and put them down in a small rough field by the tumbling Wye, and lugged a lorry-load or two of bricks up the Pass and built a spacious central living-room, from which the two railway carriages jut out at right-angles, forming thus two horns on a central head which is the living-room. The railway carriages make most somnolent bedrooms, with the singing Wye to add its charms.

The Wye, too, gives electricity. It is an all-electric house of the most modern sort, with an electric water-heater, light, toasters, vacuum cleaners, and all the gadgets dear to the unsophisticated Mayfair heart which dwells in a ferro-concrete rabbit warren at six hundred pounds a year for a few box-rooms and thinks itself modern. But Captain Bennett-Evans and his charming wife, who reads more widely than a whole covey of 'intellectuals' and has more commonsense at her finger-tips than a bevy of Berkeley moronesses, go one, or maybe two, better than Mayfair. They have a hard tennis court, a salmon river, a couple of Daimlers, and a view to inspire. Their sheep are on a score of hills, their river makes both music and electricity and brings salmon and trout to the doorstep. They are monarchs of all they survey, and every

sheep wears a golden fleece and a gilt-tipped hoof. Is that not near to the whole art of living?

It was Captain Bennett-Evans who, using one of Jack Olding's 16-h.p. caterpillar Diesel tractors fitted with special 22-inch mountain-climbing tracks, took a ton and a quarter of cattle food to the top of Plynlimmon—surely a record for any tractor almost anywhere.

There is another man who too has made a success in a lesser sphere. When Mr Jones—I shall not tell you which Mr Jones—came first to Llangurig he had seventeen pounds free capital in all the world. That was eight years ago. To-day he owns a flourishing business, a small farm, cows, sheep, and pigs, a motor-car, and a bank balance which causes him to smile in his sleep. Which merely proves that your future is where you choose to make it.

While I was descanting of these high and lofty things with John Meredith the snow began to fall again. But it had a softer, colder, damper touch to hands and face. It talked softly of rain.

"John Meredith, it's going to thaw," said I, with a Galilean pomp.

"Thaw, indeed! And there being six feet of snow in Cardiff, indeed! But"—a pause—"I do believe you're right, sir, praise be and glory. There was I fearing that in a day more or two of this the sheep would be huddlin' down by the brooks and then we would haf them drowned by the score when the thaw came and the slush came down. But praise be. There is not enough of that. We shall see in the mornin'. Good night to ye, good sir." And he was away.

Next morning black streaks showed on the mountain-face. The wind blew harshly wet. Blackbirds and finches lost that crimped, stiff look. The nuthatches and tits were pulling green tufts of moss off the sycamores. A rabbit burrow showed fresh earth-brown against the snow. Once I heard golden plover whistling high up. The river began to groan and creak. About midday there was a thunderous crack and a low roar somewhere far up the valley, and ten minutes later water showed grey above the ice in the bend. By tea-time the middle of the stream was clear and running with tiny floes of mottled grey ice jostling over the stones. The heron was on the shallows. A pair of ravens beat all along the mountain-crest, "Aak-aaking" on slow and wheeling wings.

Twenty-four hours later the snipe fields were straw-yellow with bleached rough grass. The tussocks held questing rooks and blackbirds. A barn owl, cream-yellow, beat like a great cat under the garden cedars and over the tussocks, lifting and settling. Up on the

mountain wine-red patches of bracken showed in bold squares against the parallelograms and triangles of "greenery-yallery" grass and olive gorse.

A string of lace appeared sudden and silver in a deep col in the mountain-face, above the white cottage of old Mrs Griffiths, who remembers when cottagers were so poor that eggs were never eaten but kept to be sold, and a penny was a precious thing. The stream of lace was so clear and vivid across the valley and the brawling Wye that almost one could hear the splash of its falling water.

The snow had gone. The mountains were uncovered and the streams let loose. The sheep were gay as goats, all save that dead ewe who lay stranded like a sodden woolly sack on the blue stones above the bridge, feast for dawn ravens. Had there been but three more days of falling snow and iron frost that poor carcass might have been multiplied by tens of hundreds.

Next day I walked across the hills to Marsh's Pool, where in a tiny stone fishing cottage built out of barn remnants by young Peter Lewis, who owns miles of mountains, lives Robert Gibbings, who puts colours into words and mixes them both into books. He was not at home. The cottage stood empty, incongruous with its Victorian veranda, above a little loch of some ten or twelve acres, still as silver in a bowl of empty moor and watching hills. Two tall larch-woods, thin and silent, swept down to it like embracing arms. An empty cow-stable dribbled manure from its door. Not a duck or teal stirred the cold waters of the lake. Not a snipe sprang from the squelching moss about its shores. Not a sandpiper flirted his white tail, nor any moorhen broke the surface. It was birdless. The hills and moor and the poor starved little sixty acres which lies above it were devoid of all life, but for a dozen carrion crows and one raven, visible and voracious emblems of death.

I came away reflecting that on a Scots loch I should have seen life enough, goosanders and mallard, perhaps a smew, and as likely as not a spring of teal. And had it been a Norfolk mere in those high heaths about Wretham and Merton there would have been a very frenzy of wings and an anthem of bird voices. But Wales—empty, wet, and poached to death!

The next day it rained gently and insistently. The snowdrops were out, the damp misted on the window-panes, and I had the first cold bath for a month. It was time to be moving—back to the strong, salt smell of Essex mud-flats, the sea-winds in rigging, and the geese clanging in the night.

XIV. THE TALE OF A UNIQUE ENGLISH MANOR HOUSE

Fifty Years before Columbus discovered America—Ockwells, the Domestic Counterpart of Eton—And a Little Family History—Provost Day of Eton and Sir Tom, the Jolly Hunter—Sir Edward Barry's Regeneration of the House—With Some Talk on Armour and Heraldry—Paul Wentworth of Burnham Abbey

On Ockwells' rich and feudal halls,
Its storied roof and turrets grey,
See Time's relentless power falls,
But spares the vicar's house of Bray.

Old Song

A ROCKET WHICH FELL IN A FEBRUARY SNOWSTORM TURNED back the pages of history two hundred years. It blew in the doors and windows of my Essex house, and drove me into the winter wind.

Then, by one of those odd chances which govern destinies of men and winding streams, there came a letter from that erudite antiquary and scholar of medievalism, Sir Edward Barry, asking my wife and me to stay with him at Ockwells Manor, in Berkshire. Now, Ockwells is little known, but it is famous among the esoteric few to whom old houses are an eloquent study. It is, to begin with, the most perfect brick-and-timber fifteenth-century manor house in England, built between 1442 and 1466 in the time of Henry VI when " the convulsive and bleeding agony of the feudal power " of the barons had neared its bloody apogee. Its first oaken posts were driven into the earth fifty years before Columbus discovered America. They still stand.

I know of only one inhabited, unspoiled manor house of the period—Great Chalfield in Wiltshire—and even that is younger, for it was built by Thomas Tropenell in 1490. Moreover, Great Chalfield is all of stone in a Gothic sort of style. It has, however, still its chapel and a moat. Ockwells has neither. The chapel was burned down in 1720 according to the old *Gentleman's Magazine*. That learned authority, my friend Mr Christopher Hussey, has said of Ockwells that it is " an outstandingly interesting landmark of an essentially untouched manor house of the middle

fifteenth century," a place where, in his own warm phrase, "the patina of time has grown of itself without being counterfeited."

Indeed, it took that notable historian of old houses and Mr Ralph Edwards a month to tell even a part of the history of the house and of the fine armour and old furniture which adorn it.[1]

My interest went deeper, in a personal sense, for Ockwells was the home of my family from 1581 to 1801 or so—two hundred and twenty years of life and sport in one of the most ancient houses in all England, from the middle of the glowing Elizabethan period to the full flush of Georgian elegance and extravagance.

And, since every proper man must have a love of the past, a feeling across the grave for his forbears, I had always wanted to live in Ockwells, if only for a brief period, to savour the atmosphere in which those old Days, the twelfth Provost of Eton, and his descendants, dwelt and had their comfortable being.

Then a rocket bridged the centuries and opened the doors of ancestral memories.

As you go in from the road there, in front, is a green courtyard of grass. Three great chestnuts bow their heads above the snowdrops. On the left the red bricks and bleached oak timbers of the great manorial barn, with its two huge eaved doors, flank the dovecot. In front are the stable range, and the old priest's chamber above the stable-yard arch. To the right of that is the tall, red-brick wall with the little iron gate set in a grey, monkish, stone arch which shows an alleyway of green lawn, smooth and red-walled, gazing to the flat green of the park and the massed iron-blue of winter woods. The park, level as a horseman's park should be, is laced with running brooks, sentinelled by oaks and poplars, dappled with cattle.

And then you turn and there, on the right, is the house. It has the antique bloom of a missal. It sits there, in the grass, beside its arrow-slitted wall, four peaked eaves rosy in the sun, the tall windows diamond-paned and mullioned, its walls of hewn oak and old bricks soft with the warmth of forgotten summers.

The colour ebbs and flows on roofs and walls like lights on water. Now rose, then old red, turning to tan and burnt sienna and, mastering all, that soft colour borrowed of five hundred years of suns and moons which is none of these but a delicateness of them all, a pale old red with blue and grey of lichen and wink of glass and blush of ancient brick.

[1] *Country Life*, January 12, 19, and 26, and February 26, 1924.

It is a calm and coloured old house, sitting there in its yews and lilies, like an ancient and royal maid-of-honour quizzing the past.

No chimneys break the perfect line of that roof. Those eaves, with the loveliness of their carved bargeboards, are bowed like the peaks of sun-bonnets, and all are unequal in size and pitch. That may have been by design, for there was no standardization of thought when that house was built. It was built for beauty and for use, to last and to please. It has grown out of its own earth, this old house, which is all Berkshire oak and Berkshire brick. They dug the clay to bake the bricks in those ponds across the park in Springpond covert, not three hundred yards away. When they had clay enough they put in wooden sluices and turned the ponds, fed by that lucky spring, into stews full of fat carp and tench. To-day the mallard quacks to his mate in spring and wood-pigeons come softly down to drink.

They cut the great oaks in the Royal Forest of Windsor and hewed and adzed them into shapes which are beauty and pillars more solid than stone. Even the iron of the great locks and massive hinges came from no farther than Sussex hammer-ponds. It is utterly English, this old house, as English as its oaks and clay. There is no Frenchified ornateness of decoration or roof-pitch, no Italianate ceilings or Greek pilasters, no Doric coldness of alien columns or parvenu Palladianism, but a house sprung straight and unashamed from the axes of its native workmen, the shovels and ovens of its village brickmakers.

It is like the true English character—plain but good, straight for the most part and strong, but gnarled and roughened a little here and there by the centuries. It is no child of precious pretence or affected artlessness. Its beauty is the simple but impressive beauty born of men's love of their work, their longing to have loveliness about them in their daily lives. So it stands with its feet in the farmyards which gave it life, its face to the sun across the walled yew garden, with its lavender and lilies, to the level park and shining brooks which give it joyousness.

As you look at it from the park, its walls pinkly red in the evening sun, under a sky of apple green and amber, the house looks like a patriarchal settlement. Its huge chimneys rise straight from the earth like watch-towers. The jumble of roofs, eaves, and dormers glows in the sun. Diamond-paned windows wink like the early lights of a village. The line of the vast barn, the stable range, bullock-yards, yellow straw-stacks, and cattle-sheds, with the farm-

house standing, old red also and timbered, at a discreet distance; the priest's chamber pitched crookedly and high on its empty arch; and the long, low, lichened manor wall with its one tall and narrow gate of wrought iron—all these rising from the green park against a tapestry of oak and elm and soaring poplar are as a village in little. The old house overlords and protects all. Yet it is no overpowering or lordly dominance, but a soft and sober dignity, sure in its age and substance. It is, you feel, no lord's house but the solid house of a knight, or a squire, of some man rooted in the land and safe in his responsibilities. It is, in short, an old Englishman's old house.

Look at that great entrance door, heavy studded, vast and dark grey, on huge iron hinges which band it with solid metal from side to side. Door and door-handle alike were made as much to welcome the guest and shut out the wolfish winter wind as ever they were conceived to bar an enemy. For this is no fortified house, nor ever was it such. That twenty-yard fragment of seven-foot wall, a couple of feet thick, with arrow-slits in its lovely old bricks—bricks that are pre-Elizabethan—was probably the only concession ever made to the lively dangers of war and robbery in an age of violence. Perhaps that was because Sir John Norreys was a courtier high in Henry's favour, and the old house, when he built it, was a bare six miles from the castle at Windsor by that bridle-path through the forest which has almost disappeared. A troop of horse could gallop it in twenty minutes had there been an attack on the knight's house.

But even so, in that year of 1462, men's thoughts were turning with English longing from the bare stone walls and dark staircases of the Norman castles, epitomes of repression and of civil war, back to the Saxon warmth of wood and brick, the smell of the house-fire on the hearth, and the festive family air of the meal in the great hall where the lord and his lady might eat in full view of their family, their men and women servants and tenants, and see that all had full stomachs and the fair justice of an equal horn of ale. So this old house was born from an echo of that old Saxon fairness of dealing which said that rich and poor should share bread and beef, ale and salt, in full comradeship. You may be sure that old custom of eating in the hall—whose sole survival is in the colleges of our oldest universities—was not merely the begetter of sympathy and loyalty between master and man but was the father of all good manners at the table, the spur to good cooking and good brewing.

No Norman took kindly, I dare swear, to the Saxon custom of meals in the hall. The Norman was like the Tudor upstart or the self-made man of to-day—too purse-proud and too arrogant, too unsure of himself, to share his meal-time and his presence with those whom he deemed lesser than himself. Who ever saw a stock-broker or a chain-store proprietor eat with his golf caddy or drink with his gamekeeper? Hence that modern class-consciousness which is the mother of all rancid Socialism.

So when Norreys built Ockwells he was wise. His great hall is the measure of that wisdom. You step into it from that massive front door and through high oaken screens beneath the gallery.

You step into a high hall hung with the faded banners of old battles and the glowing tapestries of forgotten bowers. Three knights in full fighting armour and a man-at-arms in chain mail gleam like silver ghosts in the soft gloom of panelled walls and a floor of golden oak. The light filters through high, diamond-paned windows, mullioned in oak, blazing softly with that unique display of heraldic glass which has few, if any, rivals in the kingdom, where

> . . . With heraldry's rich hues imprest
> On the dim windows glows the pictured crest.

On the walls hang demi-suits, horse-armour and helms, breast-plates, gorgets, bassinets and great two-handed swords and maces, rapiers and halberds, crossbows and archers' shields with boar spears and hunting swords to dress the twelve pairs of antlers of noble stags. The wooden jousting lances of the knights stand in the corners.

There above the high table in the oriel window-seat, is still that queer mummified head of a fallow buck with the oddly straight beam and points like the prongs of a stable fork. It has been here since the dimmest days, nailed always above the window-seat even when this hall was a granary and rats ran over the sacks and carters snored in the great dining-room. So too were the pair of Cromwellian jack-boots, the two old rusty spurs and the high-pommelled saddle of Queen Elizabeth's day in velvet and faded leather—relics which have seen most of the vicissitudes and passing owners of this house.

At the far, high end hang tall paintings of Elizabethans in ruffs and brocade. It is a house of history, of war, of farming and of sport, an epitome of all England in little.

It is not hard to realize, when you stand beneath the soaring beams and arching timbers of that high hall, that these beams and timbers





HOME OF THE DAYS FOR 221 YEARS · OCKWELLS MANOR, BERKSHIRE, FROM THE FORECOURT (*above*); AND (*below*) THE GARDEN

"A calm and coloured old house, sitting there in its yews and lilies"

Photos "Country Life"



THE GREAT HALL AT OCKWELLS MANOR

"Hung with the faded banners of old battles and the glowing tapestries of forgotten bowers."

Photo "Country Life"

were hewn from the forest oaks of Windsor three years before Maximilian the Great was born. Joan of Arc had died but eleven years before, and men who hewed its oaks had bowed to and cheered the glory of the Black Prince. It was already a century old when Elizabeth brought the new glory of the Tudors to embellish all history and add wealth and far colonies to the English crown.

Nor is it hard, too, to realize that each timber and weapon, each Stuart chair and Tudor four-poster bed, each helmet and breastplate, is genuine. Here are no fakes of theatrical armour, no 'pickled' antiques of cunning fabrication, no panels cut to standardized shape and size in some East End factory and planted in a pseudo-Tudor setting, no modern tapestries or bourgeois magnificence. It is all old, genuine, and workable. Everything works. There are no ancientries for the mere sake of ancientries. Even the private and personal gaming-table of François Premier, the young and ornamental King of France, on which they say he played at dice with Henry of England at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in those three gay and gaudy weeks in June 1520—even this does its work as a dressing-table. When you pull open the drawers there are the authentic salamanders and minivers, the signs private and personal, of the great sixteenth-century King himself.

The long table in the great hall, twenty-three feet six inches long, nearly two feet wide, and two and a half inches thick, is of solid forest oak. Up each side it is scored and cut by the knives and battering fork butts of men-at-arms and farm servants who cut their manchets of bread and cheese on the bare wood. The grooves and cuts make a continuous series of little troughs in the thick oak where four-and-twenty men sat down each day at noon.

So when I sit in that Great Hall I am minded of old Aubrey's description in the Aubrey MSS, when

> the lords of manours did eat in their great gothicque halls at the high table or oreile, the folk at the side tables. The meat was served up by watchwords. Jacks are but an invention of the other daye: the poor boys did turn the spits and licked the dripping pan, and grew to be huge, lusty knaves. The body of the servants were in the great hall as nowe in the guard chamber, privy chamber, etc. The hearth was commonly in the midst, as at colleges, whence the saying "round about our coal fire."
>
> Here, in the halls were mummings, cob-loaf stealings, and great number of old Christmas players performed. In great houses were lords of misrule during the twelve dayes after Christmas.
>
> The halls of justices of the peace were dreadful to behold. The

screenes were garnished with corslets and helmets gaping with open mouth, with coates of mail, lances, pikes, halberts, brownbills, battle-axes and the modern callivers, petronells and (in King Charles' time) muskets and pistols.

That old table is probably as old as the house, for it was cut to fit the length of the hall from screens to dais—and put together in the hall. You could not take it away without first cutting off the legs and then finding six or eight strong men to shift it.

So we may guess that it was here when Sir John Norreys was busy putting the finishing touches to his house, which he called Okeplace, the oaken place which is builded like a ship and has, like enough, more oak than bricks in it. It saw him, no doubt, putting in that final, crowning glory of hall and house, the nineteen—of which there are now twenty—great windows of armorial stained glass which are a *liber amicorum*, a unique poem of loyalty and friendship, for in them he enshrined the arms of his sovereign and queen, his friends and family.

It saw the proud Ffetyplaces hold their court as they held it in four other great Berkshire houses.

And after Ffetyplaces, with their lust for lands which soon shed them—for I can find no Fettiplace in Berkshire to-day—that table saw the shrewd and scholarly figure of that strong prelate, my ancestor, Dr William Day, Provost, Dean, and Bishop in one, and following him, his son William and old Sir Tom, the hardy hunter, and Sir Ralph, the sober man of farms.

After the Days, the gradual decline to a farmhouse, a granary, a place of rats and bats, of dust and dim cobwebs, until, to-day, the old table, polished and oiled again, reflects the glint of armour, the glow of spring primroses, and sees above it the tall figure in ruff and doublet of Sir Reginald Scott, Captain of Calais Castle in 1542, a century after this table was hewn from the living oak. He was an ancestor of Lady Barry, who was in turn a descendant of that Sir John Norreys himself who built this "Oaken Place" and had this table adzed from his mighty tree. Thus, in fantastic fashion, the old table has seen the wheel of history turn.

But let us begin at the beginning and see how this old oaken house was first built, for it is a little, but by no means an insignificant, slice of the very flesh and bone of our English history.

The manor of Ockwells was, in the first place, a purpresture cultivated in the years between 1251 and 1259 and granted to Richard le Norreys, "the King's Cook," some time before 1284.

We may imagine it as an enclosure or clearing of up to two thousand acres, in the wide woodlands and heaths which were the royal manors and chases of Windsor and covered tens of thousands of acres. To have obtained a grant so close to the castle means that Norreys was in some favour at Court, for his lordship of the manor would almost certainly have carried the rights of chase and warren, of hawking and hunting and taking deer and conies—no small gift in a day when game was protected by the most brutal forest laws.

Sir John Norreys, the builder of the house, was Esquire of the Body to Henry VI and Edward IV, an astute and courtly opportunist with so marked a genius for keeping on the right side of popular opinion and in the good graces of the King that a popular song nicknamed him "the Conduit" since Court intrigues and favours alike flowed through him. He began it in 1442, finished it in 1466, and put in the magnificent display of heraldic glass which I shall describe later.

The Norreys family, who eventually became Lords Norreys of Rycote, and are now at Speke Hall, in Lancashire, their native county, held Ockwells till about 1517, when a John Norreys was seized for the murder of John Enhold of Nettlebed. He was eventually pardoned at the plea of his younger brother, on payment of a thousand marks and the reversion of all his lands in Bray, Maidenhead, and elsewhere to the younger brother for life, with reversion to John and his heirs. They were, however, to be held in trust for that younger brother. However one of the trustees, Sir Thomas Fettiplace, married John's sister, Elizabeth, and so got house and lands.

These Ffetyplaces, or Fettiplaces, who came over with the Conqueror and had all the Norman voracity for lands, owned vast estates not only in Berkshire but in nineteen other counties. They held Ockwells till 1587, when the lease was bought by Provost William Day and his wife. The Days continued at Ockwells till about 1800, comfortable country gentlemen.[1] They provided a Mayor for Wallingford, where was a royal Castle, and two knights. Sir Thomas, "the keenest hunter and hardest drinker in all Berkshire," was a hard-riding follower of the Royal Buckhounds.

This jolly old hunter of buck and fox rose every morning at five, drank a bottle of his own strong, home-brewed ale, and lived to be a hundred. He farmed well, went everywhere on the back of a

[1] Kerry's *History of Bray*, and monuments and stones in Bray Church.

horse, kept a cast of hawks, and shot his snipe and woodcock on the wing with a flint-lock. A friend of his who followed these excellent precepts for happiness also lived to be a hundred. Probably both of them added that other infallible maxim for attaining a ripe and wise old age: " Keep your feet warm, your backside dry, and your head cool."

Thomas Day was actually knighted in the hunting-field, which must be unique. Queen Anne had long been struck by his cool but daring riding, his invariable courtesy in opening a gate for her or clearing a gap through a fence. So one day, when he had piloted her, she asked this jolly old squire his name.

" Thomas Day of Ockwells, happy to serve your Majesty," he replied.

" Well, Sir, I will make you a knight to show my gratitude," the Queen replied.

A sword was borrowed. Thomas Day of Ockwells knelt, was tapped on the shoulder, and was saluted. " Rise, Sir Thomas."

And, says that good historian of sport, Captain Frank Siltzer,[1] of " this good old sort," " the country laughed at this knighthood and he laughed too as he never paid the office fees but was as jolly a knight as any in the British Dominions."

Sir Ralph Day, who died in 1749, was a scholarly but undistinguished squire who put his farming and his tenants before all else, as a squire should. Later, after the death in 1801 of Miss Amy Day, the family moved to the Abingdon area, true to the old saying of Fuller that " Berkshire lands are skittish and soon cast their riders." Two hundred and twenty years in one house is good for Berkshire but a mere yesterday in East Anglia.

These Days, if I may be forgiven a little family disquisition, were originally Welshmen who followed the fortunes of the Tudors into England. They came of " a noble and ancient Welsh family," according to Norroy, King of Arms, when he granted the arms in 1582, but they may equally have been mountain reivers who thought there would be good pickings in England.

Dr John Dee, Queen Elizabeth's astrologer, and the greatest mathematician and scientist of the Tudor era, was coeval and is said to be of the same blood, both being descendants of Roderick the Great, a Radnorshire Prince of Wales. Dee was a careful scholar and a man of most outstanding attainments whose " remarkable genius in every branch of science carried him so far beyond the

[1] *Newmarket: its Sport and Personalities* (Cassell, 1923), pp. 48–49.

dull wit of the people who surrounded him that they could only explain his manifestations by the old cry of ' Sorcery and magic.' "[1]

The first Day or Daye to make his name was Doctor William Day, son of Richard Day, son of Nicholas Day, son of John Dee, " called by the English Daye," son of Morgan Dee, " a Welshman of an ancient and noble family."

This Dr William Day was elected a Fellow of Eton in 1560, became a Canon of St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, in 1564, and was appointed by Elizabeth to be the twelfth Provost of Eton on December 8, 1565, when that school was still a school for gentlemen under royal favour. He remained Provost for thirty years until 1595 and was appointed Bishop of Winchester in 1596, but died on September 20 in the following year.[2]

William Day was apparently a man of strong character and probably of avaricious disposition, such as you might expect of a Welshman. Elizabeth thought highly of him, as she did of all buccaneers—so highly that when the manners and demands of the Spanish Ambassador offended her she caused the Ambassador and his suite to be detained in gentlemanly custody in the Provost's Lodge under the minatory eye of Dr Day.

He, however, was unwise enough to immure the Spaniards on the ground floor, directly beneath his own private chambers. Whereupon they fired their ' dags ' [3] through the ceiling, causing the Provost to " hop about mightily." The spectacle of those moustached and olive-faced Spaniards firing, amid clouds of stinking smoke, and laughing at the commotion overhead as the heavy slugs ripped through the oaken boards and Dr Day danced and swore, is too good to be lost.

William Day commended himself so highly to Elizabeth that she made him Bishop of Winchester and had him in mind for the Archbishopric of Canterbury despite the fact that he had committed the awful sin of marriage. The virgin queen, like the late Lady Houston, did not like her men of affairs to marry. However, Dr Day married Elizabeth Barlow, a woman of character, and took her to Ockwells. Their son, William, married Helen, the daughter of Paul Wentworth and his wife, formerly " the widow Tyldesley " of Burnham Abbey, Bucks. Paul Wentworth was the son of Sir Nicholas Wentworth, Chief Porter of Calais and youngest son of Henry Wentworth of Codham Hall, Essex. Henry was son of

[1] *John Dee*, by Charlotte Fell Smith (Constable, 1909). See also the Cotton Charter, xiv., 1.

[2] *The Eton Portrait Gallery*, p. 203.

[3] Short pistols.

Roger Wentworth of Nettlestead and grandson of Sir Philip Despenser (d. 1423) and of Robert, Lord Tibetot, whose Nettlestead property passed to the Wentworths through his heiress Elizabeth, who was great grand-daughter of Giles, Lord Badlesmere, and, farther back, of Folke Fitz Warine. A good run of Norman blood.

Sir Nicholas founded the Lillingstone Lovell branch of the great Wentworth family. He not only owned most of the land which is now the Wentworth estate near Virginia Water, but was lord of the manors of Sunning Hill and Sunning Dale. William Day thereby brought to the shrewd Welsh blood the pure English stream of the Wentworths of Essex and Lillingstone Lovell, whose members included the two great Peters, two of Parliament's doughtiest champions of its rights. The first Peter, who was Member for Barnstaple in 1571, for Tregony in 1572–83, and Northampton from 1586 to 1593—" the unconquerable Peter Wentworth " as Hallam called him—repeatedly resisted Queen Elizabeth's despotic attempts to control liberty of speech, and told Elizabeth that it was her duty to get married, for which she clapped him in the Tower, where he died. The second Peter, who was a Knight of the Bath and Member for Tamworth from 1641 to 1653, was the one Member who dared stand up and challenge Cromwell when he stormed into Westminster Hall and ordered the removal of " that bauble," the mace.

Dr Day, however, did more than marry his son to the daughter of a great landed family. He removed the college plate. When he went the plate, valued at £1000, which would mean between £10,000 and £20,000 to-day, went with him. I have often wondered why no Etonian son of our recently ennobled money-changers has not emulated that feat of the twelfth Provost.

Eton applied again and again for the return of its plate, but Dr Day stuck to it that it was his own perquisite and property, and it was not returned till after his death.

His descendants lived on at Ockwells, and some have remained in Berkshire to this day. The man who missed the archiepiscopal stakes by a short head for a good wife may at least be gratified in his grave that one of our family has since captured the mitre—the late Dr Fitzmaurice Day, who became Protestant Primate of All Ireland and died in 1938. The last Day in the family vault under the porch of Bray Church is Amy Day, who died in 1801 at the ripe old age of eighty-one, which is the family average for longevity.

The Days finally sold the house to the Finches of Hertfordshire, but remained living on there for a century, although in 1786 it was bought by a gentleman with the beautifully alliterative name of Penyston Portlock Powney, Member for Windsor. One of the Powneys sold Ockwells to Pascoe Grenfell, the late Lord Desborough's grandfather, in 1813. He, instead of living in the grand old house, built that dreadful French hotel-like mansion, Taplow Court, whither went the stained-glass windows.

Ockwells, like so many old manor houses, fell on bad days. The popular taste was all for Georgian and Queen Anne space and light and high rooms, and after that for downright Victorian ugliness—away from the snug, brown gloom of the old wooden houses and the winking welcome of their lattice windows. Men, then as now, spurned the works of their forefathers, and chased foreign goddesses. I like to know, however, that a Day put in the two lovely overmantels over the stone fireplaces with their lozenges and Tudor roses in the solar and the Queen's Room, and the magnificent James the First staircase with its massive newel-posts and lovely finials. And, too, to guess that, perhaps Sir Tom, the hunter, first planted the coverts which, though small, are full of oaks, well placed, and show good birds.

Farmers came to live at Ockwells. One of them, Thomas Columbus Smith, put his sacks of grain in the great hall, his potatoes in the minstrels' gallery, and his carters to eat and sleep in the solar which is now the dining-room. They divided it in two, and that exquisite panelling, that noble stone fireplace, saw the roast pig and potatoes, and echoed to the snores of some artless Giles who tossed and grumbled as the rats ran over him. Thomas Columbus Smith was, like his namesake, a go-getter. He planned to turn the Great Hall into a tannery!

During that dark period when the old house was but a farmhouse and the priest's chamber was degraded to a pigeon-loft there come two shafts of light across the years. One is in the diaries of Sir J. F. W. Herschel, Bart., F.R.S., and the other is from a letter which that great scientist wrote to his friend Charles Babbage, F.R.S., inventor of the " calculating machine." Both are reproduced here by courtesy of Herschel's granddaughter, Mrs Mira Hardcastle.

In his diary, under the date Monday, August 13, 1820, Herschel writes:

> Rode with Nelson to Ockwill [*sic*] (to Mr Pyle's, a farmer there) to see his house, built before Henry VI's time belonging to the Norris

family. A very remarkable old place and little known. N.B. To take Wilkie [1] there. N.B. To procure and send Pyle a pair of Elk's horns to hang up in the hall.

These horns still hang high up in the Great Hall, but look much more like wapiti than elk horns.

In his letter to Babbage he says:

> . . . I have been chemicising a good deal. Indeed, I do little else but scour the country on horseback which I generally do five or six hours per diem. This morning I visited a very strange old place, a farmhouse, formerly the residence of the Norris family which remains in the same state almost precisely in which it was in in the reign of H. VI. It has rather excited, or revived a dormant taste for antiquarian knowledge in my chaos of a brain. Its present possessor [evidently Mr Pyle] is an intelligent man above the level of his situation and takes a pride in making himself acquainted with the history etc. of the building and preserving it as much as possible *in statu quo*.

These hitherto unpublished extracts from the private papers of the great astronomer and scientist not only give reason to bow our thanks across the grave to the discerning Mr Pyle, who might so easily have ruined the house as Columbus Smith proposed to do, but they afford an enchanting glimpse of the man who was to be one of the greatest scientists of all time, wandering on his horse for hours about the wooded ways and sandy lanes of Windsor and White Waltham, Holyport and Bray, while his " chaos of a brain " was busy solving problems which had baffled every astronomer since Galileo.

As I sit writing this at the high window-seat in the afternoon sun in that Great Hall, I see the panorama of men and times that it has known—from the first Norreys with his courtly friends, Wenlock and Beauchamp and Warwick, to Fettiplace, the cunning land-grabber, and then Sir Thomas Day, the hearty hunter and deep drinker, sitting at the long top table in his leathern breeches and Stuart hunting-coat, drinking his own home-brewed from a silver-rimmed horn, with—like enough—the mud of half the county on his long boots. And then the money-minded Columbus, with his small mind and lesser soul, dumping his sacks and roots beneath the panelling that had seen Queens and courtiers, drawing up his plans for the ultimate stinking degradation to a tannery.

Fortunately, there was at that time, some fifty years ago, a Mr Stephen Leach, one-time scholar of Eton. While he was at Eton

[1] Sir David Wilkie, the painter.

his drawing-master took him over to sketch the decayed and forlorn old manor house, overgrown with ivy and muddied about by carts and geese. It was just the sort of picturesque survival to appeal to the Victorian romanticism which Sir Walter Scott had fathered and William Morris and Burne-Jones had diverted into less Gothic channels.

Stephen Leach fell in love with the house and determined to buy it. But he was destined for the Foreign Office and what, in those days, they called the 'chancelleries of Europe.' That was before near-intellectuals at home and trade-union agitators had decided that all foreign policy could best be settled by untravelled people in Bloomsbury or pretentious economists from obscure universities.

Finally, Stephen Leach became Sir Stephen and a man of some leisure. He bought Ockwells when it was decrepit and forlorn. Ivy climbed in at the hall windows. Grass grew up to the front door. The brick floors were broken, stained, and dirty. Dust covered the panelling and cobwebs hung from the rafters. The Great Hall was ceiled over. Here and there panels in the walls had been kicked in. The stained-glass windows had gone, and stark boards filled their places.

Alone in this desolation of dust and rats stood the long hall table. Above it on the wall hung the mummified head of that buck with the prong horns which hangs above me as I write and, as like as not, hung there when Elizabeth was Queen. The Cromwellian jack-boots and the Elizabethan saddle and spurs—these alone remained of old glories. The rest was dust and the patter of rats' feet in the panelled gloom.

Sir Stephen did a drastic work. He did not pull down. He pulled out. Every brick was removed and laid carefully on the grass, and the whole intricate oaken skeleton of the old house was left exposed to the Berkshire winds. "There it stood like a great bird-cage and hardly a rotten timber in it," as Benbow Rolls, the village master-builder, later described it. Where new timbers were needed in that mighty framework Sir Stephen had them renewed from local oak. But they were few. The old carpenters of John Norreys had builded too well in the fourteen-hundred-and-sixties. To cap it all Lord Desborough most generously returned the armorial windows.

Then Sir Stephen sold it. He found that his work abroad left him no time to enjoy his house at home. He had fulfilled his Etonian boyhood dream of buying the ancient house and had put

into manhood's practice his vow to make it structurally safe and sound. The house, you would have said, was due for another downfall. But houses, like families, have their vicissitudes of fortune. And Ockwells was due for a half-century and more of good fortune.

A few years before young Mr Edward Barry, the eldest son of Sir Francis Tress Barry, Bart., the Member for Windsor, had been hunting with the Queen's Buckhounds. He same across the forlorn old house during the run, lovely among its chestnuts and poplars. He reined in his horse and fell in love. And he swore then and there to buy it. But Sir Stephen Leach had already got it first. So Mr Edward Barry had to wait. Then Sir Stephen sold and Mr Barry bought.

Now, I will preface the subsequent good fortune of Ockwells by saying that this young Mr Edward Barry was a direct descendant of that Sir Robert Barry who bore his coat armour of two lions on a dark blue ground to France with Edward I in 1297.[1] And his wife was a descendant, as I have said, of Sir Reginald Scott, Captain of Calais, and a kinsman of Norreys, the builder of Ockwells. So, after four hundred years, the old house came back to the old blood on the female side.

The Barrys themselves were originally of Manorbier, that perfect little castle on the wild coast of Pembroke, but they moved before 1545 to the manor house of Hampton Gay, in Buckinghamshire, which Sir Edward's brother, Stanley, brought back to the family about the same time that Ockwells returned. So Sir Edward, as he later became, had good knightly blood, a proper heraldic background, for such a house. Small wonder that he fell in love with it when out hunting that day. Sir Edward was a great horseman, hunting until he was seventy, and a magnificent shot. Indeed, he is brother to Mr Willy Barry, of Witchingham Hall in Norfolk, whom all good shooting men know as one of that exalted band, " the twelve best shots in England." But above these achievements of a proper man—and he can still knock down clay pigeons with the best of them at eighty-seven—Sir Edward was, and is, an antiquarian of high note, a connoisseur of old furniture and a col-

[1] There exists at the Record Office a list of the knights who went to France with Edward the First in 1297. Among them is Sir Robert Barry, summoned " to serve overseas." He blazoned his arms " DE AZURE IJ LUPARDS DE OR." These are the arms borne by Sir Edward to-day in right of his descent from Laurence Barry, who proved his right to them at the Visitation held in the reign of Queen Elizabeth as recorded at the Heralds' College.

lector of fine armour. Best of all, he is one to whom old houses are as old friends and history to be understood as a living thing. Perhaps that, and horsemanship, and a happy philosophy, are the reasons why to-day, at eighty-seven, he can walk miles, talk sense, and sleep soundly. For without a love and knowledge of the past few men can hope to have any spiritual pleasure in the present, still less achieve worthwhile works for the future.

Sir Edward put Ockwells to rights. The noble James I staircase, which had been out in the central courtyard, was put back in its proper place and perspective. The worn and broken floor of the Great Hall was ripped up, and huge planks, two and a half inches thick, were sawn from oaks on the estate and laid down. Window-panes and doors were repaired. Brickwork was repointed. Where new ironwork was needed it was made massive and true to type by the village blacksmith.

Meanwhile Sir Edward visited half England and the castles and museums of Europe to find the right furniture, armour, hangings, pictures, and weapons to furnish his manor at Ockwells as it had been in the days of Sir John Norreys, the ancestor of Sir Edward's wife.

The stained-glass windows had come back, too, from Taplow Court, where Lord Desborough had them for safe storage. One was missing, but whether it was broken or stolen in removal no one ever knew. Suffice that they are back in all their ancient glory in the place for which they were made, facing the great stone fireplace with its two roughly cut Yorkist suns in the stone. Those suns, we may imagine, were cut there in haste by Norreys when Yorkist forces were not too far from this nest of Lancastrian supporters—a mute insurance premium.

For half a century Sir Edward searched for furnishings and furniture to fit the house. To-day the result is an assembly of beauty in a house of beauty. Many of the best pieces of furniture came from English cathedral cities. Some of the tapestries came from the quays of Paris. The arras in the bedrooms and corridors were woven on looms in Arras whose forerunners supplied the castles of medieval Europe. One lovely Burgundian tapestry, a jewel of glowing colour which hangs high above the hall in the minstrels' gallery, was bought, without first seeing it, solely on the recommendation of the late Seymour Lucas, R.A.

Another, a lovely thing in old gold and blue, was bought from an old woman on a quay in Paris. A superb set of old stamped

Spanish leather wall-coverings in gold and silver on crimson was obtained from the house of the Spanish Ambassador in Mexico City.

Some pieces of furniture were found in the oddest places, as witness that superb and oldest piece of all, an early English massive oak chest with Gothic panels and decorations. It was found in a shop in Oxford Street, and not, as you might expect, in some ruined monastic cell forgotten in the Kentish marshes or hidden in Cumbrian hills. A superb and uncommon Jacobean side-table was bought in a Guildford junk-shop where it was hidden by old bedsteads. A banner in the Great Hall was captured by General Gordon from the Taiping rebels. A bunch of crossbow quarrels, believed to have been used at the siege of Honfleur, was bought in Paris. I treasure one of them. Much of the magnificent armour was bought after careful consultation with that outstanding authority, the late Sir Guy Laking. It includes a superb crusader's helm which, appositely, hangs below Sir Edward's son's steel helmet of the First World War.

Here and there a few relics of the old glories of Ockwells returned. A whole suit of chain mail, incidentally, had been chopped up with an axe by a farmer tenant and sold in small pieces at sixpence and a shilling a time to tourists. The remnants returned. So did a whole set of Elizabethan curtains which now hang in Queen Elizabeth's room. They were found locally in a small modern villa. In a housebreaker's yard at Windsor Sir Edward found, one day, an old dark grey wooden mullioned bay-window frame. It lay out on the ground, neglected and unwanted.

"Yes, it came from Ockwells," said the man. "But I don't want it. You can have it if you care to take it away, sir."

When it returned to Ockwells and was measured it was found that it fitted exactly into the window of the priest's chamber where the pigeons went in and out through a boarded entrance. So the window went back and the pigeons went out. In another Windsor yard he discovered a tall oaken pillar which, said the owner, had come from Ockwells. So back to Ockwells it went, and there it fitted perfectly into its original place at the foot of the Jacobean staircase.

So much for a brief vision of the changes in ownership and the happy chance which brought the old house back to the right and most sympathetic hands. Let us consider its structure, design, and some of the more notable pieces of furniture.

The house is built squarely round a small courtyard, round which runs a broad cloister on both floors, except on the east side, most of which is occupied by the Great Hall. This cloister is broad enough for two people to walk abreast. It is lit on the inner courtyard side by a continuous range of diamond-paned windows and opens into a succession of rooms on the outer side. This plan means, therefore, that the whole of the interior of the house is lit by a great central well of light. Some of the rooms have windows opening on to the corridor itself, thus giving them light both from the outside of the house and from the inner courtyard corridors. It is probably the earliest example of such courtyard design in England. Hussey describes both the structure of the house and its plan as " the earliest survival and most complete example of the type of a medium-sized manor house evolved by the Middle Ages in England," and he rightly adds, " Nor is there any undue foreign influence."

Indeed, the only markedly foreign influence shows itself in the strongly classical Greek design of the overmantel in the dining-room put in by William Day about 1600. The magnificent stone mantelpiece dated 1601 in the parlour, or Spanish Room, has all the Italianate Tudor richness of design and was brought by Sir Edward from the remnant of a manor house in Somerset. The richly stamped Spanish leather, which is pure gold and silver thread on crimson leather, on the walls of the same room, has few, if any, rivals in England. It is probably four hundred years old, and retains most of its original brilliance of colouring. I know of only one other display of stamped Spanish leather which can come near comparing in richness, though not in age, and that is at Wadhurst Park, lately the seat of Mr Grant MacLean, in Sussex.

But let us first examine the interior design of the house. As you go in at the great entrance door, in whose lintel are carved two grotesque medieval imps—evidently evil spirits ejected from the house—there, on the left, is the guard-room, or porter's lodge, now Sir Edward's study. This has a great stone fireplace and a lovely Tudor overmantel, considerably inlaid. Immediately opposite, on the right, are the two entrances into the Great Hall through massive oaken screens which have the original full-length panelling with cinquefoil heads. This I will describe later. Continuing along the entrance corridor, which is wide enough and high enough for a man to ride a horse along it, we come, on the left, to the gun-room and, immediately after that, to the original Henry VI staircase put in by

Norreys, a broad but undistinguished flight going straight up from the corridor.

Next is the parlour, or Spanish Room, with its magnificent mantelpiece and gold-and-crimson leather walls. The furniture in this room includes four of the exceedingly rare Bloody Mary chairs with cane seats and back, lozenge decorations on the framework and plain, barley-sugar legs, backs, and under-stretchers. There is also a perfect Charles II day-bed, and an arm-chair of the same period, a Charles I arm-chair, two uncommon James I side-tables, and among the pictures a probable Luini.

Next comes the library, a long, panelled room with massive beams and an early stone fireplace. It was formed out of the original pantry and buttery, and the very remarkable serving-hatch—a wide trap-door of oak boards, iron-bound, and hinged so as to fall down and form a table on two hanging iron legs, is still in existence. This hatch is one of the most perfect examples in the country, and comparable with those at Eton and Christ Church. Hussey describes this particular one as "so far as I know, quite unique." After the library comes the old kitchen, with a vast stone fireplace. It is now a complete modern engineer's workshop, fitted with electric lathes, drills, and fine precision tools with which Sir Edward, a master craftsman in stone and metal, has turned out many small aeroplane parts during the war.

The corridor then opens into an inner hall, from which springs the great James I staircase and its charming screen and archway erected by William Day in about 1600. Beyond the staircase and the entrance to the kitchen quarters, which are in a separate and modern wing rebuilt by Sir Edward with old materials, comes the dining-room. This is a noble apartment, panelled high up its walls, more than thirty feet long and lit by a great mullioned bay window which gazes on the forecourt. The great stone fireplace, decorated with double Tudor roses and lozenges, is surmounted by the later Grecian overmantel, put in by William Day, to which I referred earlier. Hussey considers that this room was panelled by Sir Francis Englefield about 1550, and that he inserted the stone chimneypiece with the double roses. The chamfered ceiling beams are of the original house. A concealed door in the panelling leads to the kitchen.

This room contains one of the most perfect Elizabethan buffets in England, so perfect that Queen Mary expressly asked Sir Edward to have it sent to an exhibition of early English oak furniture in

London before the war. There is, in addition, a magnificent court cupboard, whose delicately carved supports are of yew, two very large Jacobean gate-leg tables, a Henry VIII serving-table, a Cromwellian draw-table with a complete set of original Cromwellian chairs, and a richly carved Elizabethan cupboard. Indeed, when considering the structure of the house and much of the furniture one can say with Hussey that " at Ockwells we may often remark, as might the writer on Solomon's glory, that Jacobean and Georgian are of no account."

The Great Hall, which opens from the screens as we enter the main door, and has another door into the inner hall by the dining-room, is, to quote Hussey again, " as perfectly proportioned a space as one could wish to see." The lines of the roof, taking their rise from the ground in the Gothic fashion, are entirely satisfying; the delicate, moulded trusses, arching over the roof in support of the transverse tie-beam, are connected by curving wind-braces and the tie-beams by purlins.

The hall is forty-one feet long, twenty-four feet broad, and thirty-six feet high to the apex of the roof and eighteen feet to the spring of the rafters. It would, in other words, comfortably contain a block of two farm cottages; a small, but not particularly desirable, suburban residence; or the equivalent of three modern flats.

The chief and unique glory of the hall is the magnificent display of armorial windows, which has no equal in England. These coats of arms are those of the royal patrons, the noble friends and relatives of Sir John Norreys, many of whom lost their lives in the Wars of the Roses. The panels were put in probably between 1455 and 1460 in the first years of the Wars of the Roses and were, in Hussey's opinion, the work of John Grayland or John Prudde, the King's Chief Glazier, both of whom worked at Eton and would have been the obvious men for Sir John Norreys to refer to at Windsor.

The coats fall into two groups: those with vertical shields, large devices surmounting them, and no mantling, and those in which the shield is fantastically contorted and topped by a small helm and wreaths of flamboyant mantling. In every case the lights are filled up with grisaille quarries inscribed with the diagonal motto, " Feyth fully Serve," the Norreys' motto, with " Dieu et mon Droit " in the case of the Royal coat, and " Humble et Loiall." A recurring badge of three golden distaffs—one impale, two in saltire—bended with a golden ribbon, would appear almost certainly to have been the badge of the Wardrobe.

Beginning on the north side, the arms are of eighteen great personages of the Middle Ages:

(1) Sir Henry Beauchamp, K.G., sixth earl and first and last Duke of Warwick, Hereditary Pantler to the King, King of the Isle of Wight. Died, aged twenty-two years, in 1446. The arms of this remarkable youth are defective; but the helm, mantling (or and gules), and crest (five columbines erect azure, leaved and slipped or, the personal crest of the young duke) remain.

(2) Sir Edmund Beaufort, K.G., Duke of Somerset, Constable of England. Killed at the first battle of St Albans, 1455.

(3) Margaret of Anjou, Queen of Henry VI. The shield is ensigned with a huge overshadowing triple-arched and jewelled open Royal crown. The Queen's motto, "Humble et Loiall," appears in the surrounding grisaille. Below the shield occur the supporters, the white antelope of Henry VI and the golden eagle of Hungary.

(4) Sir John de la Pole, K.G., Duke of Suffolk, who married the sister of Edward IV. Born 1442.

(5) Henry VI.

(6) Sir James Butler, K.G., Earl of Wiltshire, Hereditary Chief Butler of Ireland. Attainted and executed 1462.

(7) The Abbey of Abingdon. Argent a cross patonce between three martlets sable.

(8) Richard Beauchamp, Bishop of Salisbury (1450–81), surveyor of works of St George's Chapel from 1461. Quarterly (1 and 4) Gules a fess between six martlets or, for Beauchamp (2) gules a lion passant in pale argent, for De la Mere (3) azure three roach naiant argent, for Roche; all within a bordure of argent semy of tonsure caps sable.

(9) Sir John Norreys. Argent, a chevron between three raven heads erased sable, for Norreys, impaling quarterly (1 and 4). Argent three covered cups sable, for Clitherow; (2 and 3) a castle triple towered with a portcullis raised sable, for Oldcastle. Crest: a raven rising proper. The impaled coat is that of Sir John's second wife, Eleanor, daughter of Roger Clitherow of Goldstanton, Ash, in Kent, Admiral of the Seas from the Thames westward, by Matilda, his wife, daughter and heiress of Sir John Oldcastle, *jure uxoris* Lord Cobham. The shield is supported by



OCKWELLS MANOR

(*Above*) "An inner hall, from which springs the great James I staircase . . . erected by William Day about 1600" (*Below*) Queen Elizabeth's Room.

Photos "Country Life"



BURNHAM ABBEY, BUCKS: THE ELIZABETHAN HOME OF PAUL WENTWORTH, M.P., AND HIS WIFE, HELEN DAY

"This low, straggling house of holy quiet . . . sitting anciently in a great grass plat."

By courtesy of the Reverend Mother, Society of the Precious Blood

two white sea-otters collared and chained or, each otter with a fish in his mouth proper. The supporters are of considerable interest. The raven crest is full of life, but the otters are weaker in drawing than the supporters of the English coats.

(10) Sir John Wenlock of Wenlock, K.G., Chamberlain to Queen Margaret, created Lord Wenlock by Edward IV. Changed back to Lancastrians, and killed on their side at Tewkesbury, 1471. Sir John Norreys of Ockwells appointed him supervisor of his will and left him, as a legacy, a gilt-covered cup called "The Housewife."

(11) Sir William Lacon of Stow, Kent, Lord Chief Justice. Died at Bray, 1475. Azure, five fleurs-de-lis or. Crest: seven bulrushes sable, slipped and leaved or. This canting coat (*i.e.*, bulrushes and yellow flags grow on a lake) was suggested, with every show of probability, as the Lacons' by Mr Everard Green in his description of the Ockwells glass. Sir William changed his arms before his death.

(12) Mortimer, probably of Chirk Castle. Azure, three bars or, on a chief of the second, a pale between two gyrons of the second; over all an inescutcheoned ermine. The shield is ensigned with a silver helmet.

(13) Sir Richard Nanfan of Birtsmorton Court, Captain of Calais.

(14) Norreys. Same as 9, impaling Merbrooke (Sir John's first wife).

(15) Sir John Langford, who married Katharine, daughter of Sir William and granddaughter of Sir John Norreys, by Alice, his first wife.

(16) Quarterly (1 and 4). Argent a bend gules (2 and 3) barry of six gules and argent, on a chief of the last a lion passant azure. Mr Green assigned this coat to the family of De la Beche, of Yattendon.

(17) John Purye of Bray, body-servant to Henry VI. This superb coat is clearly seen, one from the right. (1 and 4) argent on a fess sable between three martlets, as many mullets all counter-changed for Purye; (2 and 3, renewed) gules, a chevron or, between three moorcocks sable, for At-more. Mantling, argent and sable; helmet wreathed gules and argent. Crest: a peacock's head between two eagles' wings.

(18) RICHARD BULSTRODE, Keeper of Wardrobe to Margaret of Anjou, Comptroller of Household to Edward IV, nephew of Sir John Norreys. Quarterly (1 and 4). Sable a buck's head caboshed argent, attired and ensigned with a cross or, pierced through the nose with an arrow barwise of the last, for Bulstrode; (2 and 3) argent a chevron gules, between three squirrels sejant sable. Crest: a squirrel sejant gules holding in his dexter paw a bunch of nuts or. These belong to Chopinden, the former name of the family.

We owe it to Lord Desborough's grandfather that this priceless heritage was not lost or destroyed in those Victorian days when the inevitable cry was, "It's old—pull it down or throw it away."

I have suggested to Sir Edward that he should emblazon his own arms, which are older than some of those, in the lights in the opposite window, since it would be a fit memorial to one who has not only done so much to restore and revive the original state and dignity of the house, but has given it an added charm and the embellishment of furniture, arms, and armour probably finer than at any time in its previous history.

Upstairs the rooms, landing, and cloisters more or less match in size and panelling those beneath them. Above the dining-room is the lovely Queen Elizabeth's Room, with a superb and most delicately carved Elizabethan four-poster bed. A contemporary portrait of Elizabeth on wood, showing her imperiously young with red hair, a ruff, and a square jewel at her throat, is a luminous picture by an unknown artist. It came from Stoke Poges Manor House.

Other rooms contain some really magnificent four-poster beds, any of which would add distinction to the most discerning museum and be roped off from the curious visitor. At Ockwells all are slept in. There is, in the porch-room, a heavily majestic Henry VIII bed which was probably royal property, since it bears on the headboard the carved bas-reliefs of Henry, surrounded by the Tudor rose, and Catherine of Aragon. Catherine's pomegranate badge is carved four times on the canopy.

And here let me tell a curious story about this porch-room. It is a noble room, high-ceiled and heavy-beamed, with windows which gaze on the park and forecourt. You approach it along the minstrels' gallery and through a small, panelled powdering-room whose window looks out on the forecourt. Both rooms are well lit, the work of Sir Stephen Leach. But look at the old drawings of Ockwells in Lysons' *Magna Britannica* and other works, and you

will see that, a hundred years ago, the powder-room window was completely blocked up and the porch-room had but one tiny window. All the rest were bricked in. That may have been a result of the iniquitous Window Tax or due to some other design.

Now, one Sunday an old lady of seventy-five—Mrs Dale, who lives in Lock Lane in the near-by village of Cox Green—came up to Ockwells to tell me of her days in the house as a farm servant-girl, sixty-two years ago, when she worked for half a crown a week, rising to three-and-sixpence at the age of twenty and finally leaving to better herself at a yearly wage of eleven pounds. But, as she sagely added, " money went a long way farther in those days, and we were just as happy." Mrs Dale remembered, however, one farmer at Ockwells who so starved his farm-boys that they had to eat the tallow candles.

She recollected, charmingly, the pair of robins which flew in at the broken windows of the Great Hall each spring and nested in " Cromwell's Boots "—for none other than Oliver, says the village legend, left those great leather jack-boots. They hung in those days on the wall, and the floor of the Great Hall was broken bricks with the earth showing and the rats running riot " like young dogs."

Three rooms upstairs and the dining-room and kitchen below were all that were occupied then by Mr Wilkerson, the farmer. Queen Elizabeth's Room was an apple-store; dust and the great grey rats had the rest.

Sitting in the Great Hall, Mrs Dale pointed upward to the gallery and the door of the powder-room.

" That was the dungeon," she explained simply. " All black inside and the door nailed up so that you couldn't get into it or into the big room beyond. They put the prisoners in there in the old days."

Now, this simple village legend, like the tale of Cromwell's boots, may mean anything or nothing. But it is just possible that the porch-room, lying as it does, above the guard-room, was a receptacle for prisoners in a house which certainly never possessed either cellars or dungeons but was none the less built in a day when prisoners were taken and kept as long as the lord pleased. A pretty thought, even if only a thought.

We went one afternoon of pale sun, my wife and I, to see Burnham Abbey. It lies, unknown and forgotten by the world, hid in leafy lanes at the back of Dorney, that shy village near Eton in whose manor-house still dwell the Palmers, whence sprang the

voluptuous Barbara who became Charles the Second's Lady Castlemaine.

I wanted to see Burnham because it held another deep ancestral root. And, like the Chinaman, I find an abiding satisfaction in rooting out dusty ancestors. It is a harmless enough vanity and, to the man of imagination, opens the forgotten pages of enchanting histories. Every man, great or humble, has the blood of men and women whose deeds and ways of life are worth resurrection. Live their lives in imagination, for a brief space, and your own is, by so much, the richer. Half the rootlessness and dissatisfaction of modern life, its lack of good taste in architecture and manners, its preoccupation with a tinny materialism whose gods are Speed in Getting Nowhere and Belief in Nothing—is due to the deliberate cultivation among adolescent minds of a contempt for the past, an egoistical satisfaction with the shallow 'culture' of a B.B.C.-educated present.

Well, to abandon moralizing, it was at Burnham that Paul Wentworth lived after he had married his beloved Helen, "the widow Tildesley," who was daughter of Richard Awsham or Agmondesham. From that family Amersham took its name.

Now, Paul was a religious and peaceful man, a Puritan who was yet an aristocrat, a zealot who was no bigot, a brave man and yet a lover of quiet things. Third son of Sir Nicholas Wentworth of Lillingstone Lovell, who had great estates in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Essex, Paul came into little of them, enough simply to maintain him in the dignity of a country gentleman who was also a Member of Parliament and high in the trust—if not always in the good books—of his queen, Elizabeth.

Paul liked a quiet life in leafy places, a river full of fish, meads patterned with cattle, his family all about him in a patriarchal way and his Sovereign at a comfortable, but not too great, distance. He found all this at Burnham.

At the dissolution of the monasteries Henry VIII had granted a lease of the Abbey to his Helen's first husband, William Tildesley. Paul renewed it from Elizabeth for twenty-one years and took great delight in improving the house. It was neither very large nor small—a house long and low and straggling, with many red-pitched roofs and walls strengthened with great buttresses, lancet windows set in stone and brick, and a gracious private chapel which Paul, who was a devout Protestant, beautified. In it he brought up his family to a lively and practical Christianity of a robust English sort.

The mere names of the rooms have a haunting charm, the Long Chamber, the Lady Chapel, the Refectory, and the Nuns' Hall.

It was all set, this low, straggling house of holy quiet, amid barns and great stackyards and orchards, with a high wall round it and a deep ditch, or moat, digged about most of it. Deep woods bosomed it, and Paul could hunt wild boar and red stags and fallow deer on his own demesne or hawk mallard and herons on the marshy meadows by the Thames. Cloudy above far trees the blue towers of Windsor reminded him of that hawk-nosed and dominant Queen whom both he and his brother, Peter, were to dare and offend, for their high principles.

So on that February afternoon of sunlight, pale as champagne, we went into Burnham Church, cool and alone with itself, to see that graceful mural to Paul who, " as he lived most Christianlike so he died most comfortably." It is handsome but not ornate and shows the fifteen quarterings of Wentworth, Despenser, Clare, Goushill, Poynton, Oyry, Camoys, Tibetot (later Tiptoft), Chaworth, Badlesmere, Fitz Simon (of Shoebury, Essex) and Manfield, Colville (?), Abberbury, Swinford (?) and Chamber.

It is of some small historic interest since it is the only mural which shows the full Lillingstone Lovell quarterings, although there are enough Wentworth murals and other monuments to spare in Yorkshire, Suffolk, and at Gosfield in Essex.

Let us consider Puritan Paul for a moment. He was Member of Parliament for Buckingham from 1563 to 1567, and for Liskeard in Cornwall from 1572 to 1583. In his first Parliament he was chosen by his fellow Members for the highly dangerous task of representing to Elizabeth, who had already banned the subject, that it was high time that she should not only name her successor but also make plain whether she intended to marry or not.

Elizabeth flatly forbade the Commons even to debate these prickly matters.

Whereupon up rose Puritan Paul and "desired to know whether the Queen's command and inhibition that they should no longer dispute of the matter of succession, were not against the liberties and privileges of the House." [1] On which the House, much heartened, proceeded to debate the matter for five hours. Elizabeth promptly had the Speaker on the mat at *nine o'clock* the next morning and forbade all further discussion.

Paul's courage, however, commended itself to the Queen, for

[1] D'Ewe's *Journals*.

she paid him the signal compliment of committing that powerful prisoner, the Duke of Norfolk, to his charge at Burnham, in October 1569.[1]

Paul swam once more into the limelight in a notable manner, for on January 21, 1581, he made a motion in Parliament for

> a public fast and daily preaching . . . the preaching to be every morning at seven of the clock before the House did sit; so that they, beginning their proceeding with the service and worship of God, He might the better bless them in all their consultations and actions.

The motion was carried by 115 to 100, those voting against it including Sir Francis Knollys, Treasurer of the Queen's Household, and those for it, Mr Thomas Cromwell.

This was the origin of the daily prayers in the House of Commons. Elizabeth was furious. She said that all fastings and prayer days were of her ordering only, and that Mr Wentworth's motion was presumptuous and that it was partly due to her own "lenity towards the brother (Peter Wentworth) . . . who in the last session (1576) was by the House, for just causes apprehended and committed, but, by her Majesty, graciously pardoned."[2]

However, having said her say, she let the prayers go on, and Paul heard no more of it and, indeed, on July 14, 1590, she granted him a further thirty-one years' lease of Burnham Abbey.

During these golden Elizabethan years while Drake, Raleigh, and Hawkins were making sea history, Paul was busy about his Abbey. He made the great Nuns Hall habitable, and is supposed to have made slight alterations to the Long Chamber, the Lady Chapel, and the Refectory. Cole, the Vicar, and antiquary of Burnham from 1774 to 1780, says he "turned the Nuns' Hall, which was open to the tiles, into a smaller room and made rooms over it."

He had only 243 acres at Burnham, most of which was wood, but he grazed 320 sheep on the Copsley Hills at Claydon and had 140 acres at Hogshaw as well as leaseholds at Clewer Court, Soulbury, Abbots Ripton, Huntingdonshire, and leases of the rectories or parsonages of Dorney and Burnham. In addition, he had, presumably, an interest in the large family estates in Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Essex.

I find one sidelight on the puritan zeal of this forbear in the bare note in the State Papers that on January 26, 1584, an inventory was made "of the books and other Popish relics found in the House of

[1] Haynes' *Burghley State Papers*, p. 539.

[2] Rutton's *Wentworth Pedigree*, p. 252.

Mistress Hampden of Stoke and carried away from thence by Mr Paul Wentworth."

The man who could dare the wrath of Elizabeth for the sake of his religious beliefs could also raid the house of the ancestress of John Hampden. Small wonder that his epitaph in Burnham Church describes him as " strong in faith, steadfast in hope, fervent in love, a zealous professor of the truth, and an earnest detester of all superstitions."

He, his wife, and children, including his second daughter, Helen, who married William Day, are all buried in Burnham Church; and as I stood there in the pale February sunshine which filtered through the windows, I felt a warmth for this godly and high-minded man and " Ellen, his dear and loving wife," to whom in his will, of which I have a copy, he left his plate, jewels, leases, goods, chattels, and ready money. Ellen, or Helen, lived on at Burnham Abbey for twenty-one years and died there on November 8, 1615.

So, thinking of Paul and his " dear and loving wife " and their family, we went in search of the Abbey. Now, to-day, it is owned by a society of Anglo-Catholic gentlewomen called the Society of the Precious Blood, who have forsworn this chaotic world and its " scientific blackguards, churls, and conspirators," and live at peace with God amid their gardens and orchards.

I asked a man at a little hedgerow inn the way to the Abbey. I liked the look of that inn, for, although it was within a half mile of garish new villas, within sound of the traffic on that concrete speedway, the Great West Road, and within sight of bungalows and chicken runs—all the draggletails of London—it held still the air and scent of a farm labourers' pothouse, a place where waggons halted and ploughmen looked in for a midday pint.

" Down yon lane, turn right, and you'll see it on the corner," said the man at the inn. " Rare old place. Full o' nuns that is. Got a big cob-wall round it with a tiled roof top of it. Thick enough to bury a man in, that wall is. They did too once! "

" How was that? "

" Some servant gal at the Abbey. Had a young man what did a murder. Police was all out arter him. So the gal hid him in a hole in that wall and fed him o' nights. He laid there snug for days."

Down that lane of tall elms, between flat fields, we came to the wall which had hid and held the murderer.

And within it, sitting anciently in a great grass plat, amid bee-hives, beneath orchard trees treading in aconites and snowdrops,

crouched the old home of Helen Wentworth—a smiling house, low and grey-walled, with a jumble of red roofs and many windows, mullioned and arched. A homely house of a rural and ancient dignity, something between a manor-house where the cows look in at the windows and a great house of monkish pride.

So, having had word with the Mother Superior beforehand from behind a grille, we walked in and met her—a sweet and dignified woman whose voice and face were a thousand years removed from this world of bombs and slaughter. She talked of Paul Wentworth as though he had lived yesterday, and was not unduly surprised that his descendant should arrive thus suddenly.

"Of course, it was a farmhouse for years," she explained. "I have heard that they even put cattle in the Lady Chapel and carts in the Refectory. You must see round your old home."

And thus, four centuries after, as though it had been a yesterday, we walked through Paul's house.

A sister said charmingly, pointing to a great fireplace high in an empty wall, bare to the winds, "That was put in by your ancestor. The room, however, has gone. These were his beehives, built into the garden wall. This was his doorway, we believe."

And then later, after tea, there was evensong in the dim and lovely chapel, sisters kneeling, prayers sung and chanted, and, finally, most graciously, a blessing as we knelt in that house which had known no Wentworth for four hundred years.

We were back, for a brief recaptured moment, in the older England of a more godly and a happier world.

Far in the distance the guns thundered in the night sky over London.

So for a month or two we abode at Ockwells while spring came to England and death went to Germany. The gentlemen adventurers were giving the final knock-out to the robber barons.

Spring came delicately in those cold, unconfident months of early 1945. By night the owls hooted and mewed in the great oaks in the park. Bombers growled under a headlong river of stars to the tigerish agony of Berlin. The moon shone wanly through the ancient blazonry of Henry and Margaret of Anjou, and paled the last embers of great logs in the mighty stone fireplace till they fell into grey ash—as grey as the ashes of those cities beyond the Rhine which were falling in a dusty damnation bloodier than any of the myriad wars which had drawn men forth from this old house since York and Lancaster sent the last of feudal England to the dust in

armoured downfall; now a different armour was thundering through the forests and cities of Europe. In the dawns the lawns were white with frost. A fox prowled nightly in the yew garden and left his stink strong among the lavender.

One week-end we went down to Old Hall—Peter Caldicott Smith, that dry wag, and I, he full of wounds from five years in Burma. In a last grand day of the season we slew a wild swan—which fell like unto the downfall of a haystack—a couple of brent geese, ten tufted duck, and a miscellany of coots, snipe, and waders. It was a day of cold sea-winds and high, cold-blue skies. The sea glittered and the duck were in hundreds, shooting up the rippled fleets and over the tall brown reeds like bullets. We saw sixteen wild swans in a windy cohort, and a host of the black geese. And at night John Fell sat in his cottage under the wood and told us of the black shuck-dog which he had twice seen run by him, silent, silent as death, swift and huge, on White House Hill, on the Great Wigborough Road, and of two other men, one of Salcott and one of Wigborough, who had seen the same great hound. It is no more and no less than that old inherited Viking tale of the Black Hound of Thor which you will find up all the East Coast, in the pathway of the Danes.

We roasted the swan, as a proper heraldic bird, after he had hung for a fortnight, and ate him at Ockwells in medieval style beneath a high-raftered roof in the golden dusk of that panelled room which had seen the falconers bring home the swan and the bittern, the heron and hare.

It was good and tender, and, for the guidance of those who may doubt the eating of a swan, I will say—since I have eaten many—that first you hang him for a fortnight, then draw and clean, stuff him with two large, raw Spanish onions cut in half which must remain for a day and a half and thereby draw out any fishiness of flavour, then throw away the onions, stuff with mincemeat and spices, of which cinnamon, thyme, and mint are not the least, garnish with bay-leaves, and roast, roast slowly and lovingly, for five full hours. At the end he will be dark, tender, and caressing to the tongue. And this, mark you, for a swan of two years and not for a mere stripling cygnet, which is an easier affair altogether.

We shot pigeons as the first snowdrops gleamed white in the winter woods, and saw the herons fish in the running brooks, the Ayrshires and Shorthorns move in slow majesty homeward in the western sun.

The flat green levels of the park took on a younger green, and the lichens on the manor roofs and in the garden walls blushed crimson and silver with new growth in the warming sun. Timber hauliers pulled great oaks and elms out of the coverts, and the carrion crows "clink-clinked" like young ravens as their old nesting trees were hauled away. All Berkshire took on a tender youth, and the badgers who most cunningly had their sett under a road where lorries thundered hourly—for who would look for badgers in such a bold place ?—brought out their winter bedding to sweeten in the young suns of dawn.

One day Mr James Mann, who is Armourer at the Tower of London and a fount of medieval wisdom in himself, came down to talk heraldry and balance lovingly in his hand that crusader's helm with its curtain of chain mail for the neck which is nigh perfect and made all of one piece of metal, a most cunning and beautiful work. Had it but the visor and nose-bar it would be a piece with but three or four rivals in all England and of a value that would have ransomed a Constable of France in the old days.

Which reminded me, somehow, of the many and tragic ways in which armour, which to-day would be almost above price, was thrown away by the children of those who once wore it.

Lord Pembroke's great collection at Wilton, which fetched tens of thousands when it was sold, lay rusted and neglected for years in the barns and stables. Much was, in any case, lost, stolen, and thrown away, the sport of farm-boys and yokels.

One of Lord Dillon's ancestors sent *two tons* of medieval armour and weapons from that lovely house at Ditchley to the village blacksmith as old iron. Had it been kept it might have realized enough money to have saved the estate itself from ultimately passing into other hands.

There may well be other lesser hoards of such 'old iron' in the forgotten manor houses and castles of Britain.

The South Country beckoned with her chalk downs and sweet trout waters, so I went South one day to visit old haunts by Test and Wallop Brook. Bossington seemed grey and empty without the deep laughter and mighty personality of Dick Fairey, but he was away in America helping to put Britain foremost in the air. His sister and Algy Maudslay were in the empty house which once had seen such happy shooting and fishing-parties, whose walls had so often heard the onset of this war and all its terrors of the air prophesied by the man whom Whitehall would not heed in those locust days.

The Test was still clear and lucent in the runs where the big trout lie, still splashing noisily through the weir by the fishing hut. Snipe bleated on the Horse-bridge water-meadows, and the mallard quacked liquidly in the carriers among the osiers, and the golden willows, that cloud of sheer beauty, blushed crimson and lemon at the junction of the waters below the mill, at the lawn's foot.

I went on to Linkenholt Manor, sunning itself under its woods by Andover, to dine with Mr Roland Dudley, that pioneer of mechanized farming and stout individualist, and to congratulate him on his forthright stand against the War Agricultural Committee from which he had resigned in protest and disgust. Mr Dudley is the type of practical, travelled gentleman-farmer, shrewd of mind and bold in thought and principle, who should be in Parliament. Farming will need the championship of such men in the future if it is not to be delivered, bound hand and foot, to the bureaucratic mercies of full nationalization, or the no less deadly, if less obvious, dangers of permanent control and direction from Whitehall.

We discussed all these portending matters of gloom and drank the most celestial claret and port, a pre-war dream, while the dogs slept and the logs crackled. For it is always as well to marry pessimism with bodily comforts, else the exquisite English pleasure of grumbling would lose its savour.

On to sleep at that gracious inn, the Grosvenor at Stockbridge. Stockbridge is surely one of the happiest and sunniest of towns, for there two—or is it three, or maybe four—trout streams swirl and whisper under the very main street of the town, and the Downs in calm beauty look down on this paradise of the fly-fisher and the racing man. For it was at the Grosvenor that that great jockey and trainer, Tom Cannon, ended his days, and it was at Chattis Hill, above the town, that Atty Persse added fresh laurels to the already immortal crown of that great racing stable.

Next day I saw, and lunched with, Mr Rex Patterson at Hatch Warren, high above Basingstoke, on the Farleigh Wallop ridge, where Gerard Portsmouth's house stands most graciously among tall trees, its windows to the wide blue vale and the far indigo woods of Ewhurst and beyond. Mr Patterson's case against the Hampshire War Agricultural Committee is too well known—and well worn—for me to dig up its dry bones, but I felt an immense sympathy for this gentle-mannered, middle-aged Scot, who, starting with nothing, to-day farms seven thousand acres and has been harried and driven by petty officials until one wonders why he continues to farm at all.

And then back to Ockwells to discover that the chestnuts were in sticky bud and the plum-trees a foam of white like a breaking surge, above the red walls of the dovecot. A cherry was shyly thinking of its youth under the end of the great barn, and from the windows of my great raftered and panelled bedroom, that room in which, they say Queen Elizabeth slept as Provost Day's guest and patroness, I saw the tits play at courting in the arrow-slits of the curtain wall, and pigeons against a sky of soft blue and lamb's-tails. And spring had come, green and shy.

So we drank a glass of that pale and delicate wine which "Missen"[1] made from Ockwells grapes, even as they made white and black wines here when Elizabeth was a regal guest.

I remember that old house as one remembers the moods of a woman loved. Dark crimson on wet evenings of whirling winter winds, with the woodwork grey in the dusk, and the whole heraldic glory of those high windows bursting into sudden, unearthly light and colour against the background of dark eaves and darker roofs and black, moon-ridden clouds. Within, the dim figures of the knights stood mailed and silver in the pale gloom of panelled walls. Breastplates glinted, and a sword here, a helm on a dark chest, a spear there, or a tattered flag hanging high, struck notes of muted colour.

On quiet nights of spring the full moon shone white through the high windows. It cast unearthly shadows. Almost one fancied that faces, friendly but long dead, gazed greyly from the gallery, from those quiet secret doors high in the gloom.

And if one went outside on the dim whiteness of the grass this sense of watching faces deepened. There stood the house, secret and only half-revealed, a chimney slim and stark against the sky, a mullioned window winking like a diamond. But other windows were dark and quietly warm. They held secrets to themselves, old and very family things. There were faces, half-guessed, behind those upper windows of empty chambers, faces of young girls long since dead, and youths gone to forgotten wars, and grave men and women, now dust, all part of the life and very structure of this old house, which had been their home, their lover, and their mother.

And yet one felt, standing in the gloom of the ivied chapel wall beneath the empty moon glittering on the priest's chamber and on the dark bulk of the house, on those silent windows at whose panes glowed secretly the dream faces of the long-dead, that here was

[1] Mrs Caldicott-Smith, that priestess of domestic enchantments and ancient recipes.

no place for fear but a place for comfort and peace, for the giving of unspoken confidences and the receiving of ancient balm. Such an old house has a spiritual quality, blent of the lives and thoughts of those who have lived beneath its roof.

In those calm dusks of spring evenings, when primroses glowed under the gold and silver gleam of willow-catkins, there was the sharp scent of half-burned logs on a mountain of grey ash in the great fireplace—a strange old smell of wood polished and of wood burned, of spring buds and a sharp wind, of old tapestries full of dust, and armour, vaselined and dimly shining, of dogs wet from the March rain and floors stained by muddy boots—the friendly scents of an old house, lived in, used, and long loved.

Outside, the cat-owls mewed and the dogs barked for supper in the stable. A timber cart rumbled under the arch of the priest's chamber and tumbled down its last load of logs with dull and furry thuds. Calves, newly weaned, mooed pitifully, and a late magpie chacked from a white plume of blossom against the wet crimson of the barn wall. The wind got up and moaned and thundered in the chimneys. And candles were lit, logs stirred and blown, sparks flew up the chimney, and the smell of a roast duck was good.

What will be the future of the old house? No one can say. Both the late Lord Desborough and Sir Edward, who owns all surrounding land, have in the past refused good offers to sell their land for jerry-building purposes. The result is that the Ockwells estate, which is just under a thousand acres, and Lord Desborough's lands, still provide a beautiful stretch of unspoiled country, crossed by old green roads and public bridle-paths, pleasant with woodlands and musical with brooks. This oasis of an older England lies between the slightly raddled beauties of Maidenhead to the west, the theatrical Olde Englyshnesse of Bray to the north, and the self-conscious trimness of Holyport to the east. It is a region in which the stockbroker and the theatrical star have alike found their conception of rural life, but it is equally a region still full of natural and unspoiled English beauty, of old lanes and woods where the badgers shamble.

The partridge calls in the fields. The owls hoot and mew at night. The heron fishes the watercress brooks. There are wind-hovers swinging above the stackyard and yaffles laughing in the old park oaks. Foxes swarm, in spite of the attentions of that somewhat over-popular pack, the Garth, many of whose followers appear to

dress to kill and hunt in order that they may dress—a vainglory by no means confined to the Garth.

In the future Ockwells may well seek a new owner. Any man with money may walk the hall and cloisters that have known kings and queens, courtiers and prelates, Norreyses and Ffetyplaces in fighting armour, the Provost in his gown, the bluff face and muddy boots of Sir Tom, the hunting pink and loving care of Sir Edward.

Who, one may well ask, will preserve this last and unique, this most homely and domestic link with the England of the Middle Ages? He must be a man of taste and discernment. No cocktail mentality would feel at ease in such a house, nor would the house, I dare swear, give easy sleep to such an one. It is a house for port and good claret, for home-brewed beer and roast beef, for old brown sherry and young blood-hunters.[1]

I should wish no better than to see it, should it ever be sold, become a royal manor. That puissant medieval royal prince, Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, lived in it, and it has been visited by Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou; Queen Elizabeth; probably Queen Anne; George the Fourth, who liked it so well that he had its facade copied in a house which stands near St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle; and finally by the later King George V and Queen Mary, who has been to see it no less than four times, and the present King and Queen. It is within easy reach by field and woodland path of Windsor, a house neither too large nor too small, of an abiding English homeliness and of a fit dignity and proper history to be the minor residence of a prince.

Thus, this oaken place, symbol of the very timber and heart of England, might still "Feyth fully Serve."

[1] Sir Edward Barry has since entered into a restrictive covenant with the National Trust which ensures the future preservation of the house—no matter who owns it—and 260 acres of surrounding woodland.

XV. WINDSOR IN WAR

The Royal Farms and Gardens—Cattle, Sheep, Pigs, and Poultry—In Praise of the Weymouth Pine—Forestry on Ten Thousand Acres—A Sitwellian Dairy—Forty Thousand Eggs a Year—The Queen's Garden—And the Charm of Adelaide Cottage

> This was the King who rose with the lark
> To canter his hack in Windsor Park,
> Who loved his England of wold and wood
> And saw its beauty as sportsmen should. . . .
> And the happiest hours of the King's content
> Were the golden hours in the sunshine spent.
>
> WILL H. OGILVIE

ACROSS THE PARK, ABOVE THE SPRING-GILDED TOPS OF TUDOR oaks, the Castle stood on the horizon, an unearthly vision of grey splendour.

Silver and wan grey, keep and towers, battlements and turrets, compactly vast, the great bulk of Windsor seemed hung between earth and heaven, an unreal castle on the rim of the world.

That is Windsor as you see it from the Ascot road where it breasts that little rise by the Ranger's Lodge. So I saw it as I came in from Ockwells beneath an aeroplane-noisy sky. A thousand years of English history transmuted into stone, unreal in the spring sunshine, silent beneath the wings of war. Echoes of fights and forgotten battles, shades of princes and dusty kings, ghosts of gentle queens—Windsor, seen in that short, discovered minute of mirage, was the lovely, unforgettable symbol of them all.

A red stag crossed the road ahead, leisurely, twelve atop and a massive beam. He seemed to tread the bracken with the unhurried steps of destiny. There will be stags of his blood roaring beneath the great oaks at November moons long after Hitler is but a name, when Nazi Germany is a smudge on the page of history.

A Spitfire zoomed and whistled overhead. A little Magister training machine hedge-hopped noisily over the brooding oaks. Soldiers, khaki, red-faced, glistening with sweat, marched dustily. On a rise the rim of a bomb crater showed unreally.

I remembered it suddenly as I had seen it three autumns before, when in the woods which stood with their feet in the bracken, the

woods where the fox barks by night and the woodcock flaps ghostly in the dusk, there were guns pointed skyward. Bridges on the roads by which I had travelled were mined. Concrete pill-boxes dominated them, threatened cross-roads with scythes of fire. Tank-traps and tank-barriers lurked beneath the quiet trees in heathery valleys that had seen the gallant cavalry of Prince Rupert and known the green-velveted riding parties of Queen Anne.

Machine-gun nests hid in the ditches and behind trees at road-corners—the runways of human beings—with all the cunning of a poacher's snares set in the runways of rabbits or the smeuses of hares.

Beyond it all, beyond this hidden, half-seen sinister network of war which had spread its fingers through the heart and hedgerows of England, loomed Windsor—grey and stately, unreal and aloof.

But I had come to Windsor, oldest home of the Sovereign, to see how this ultimate palace was meeting the war. It had met it as all England had met it—with a resolute preparedness.

"If that goes, everything goes," said my chauffeur, a man of little imagination and few words. I looked at him. That hard-jawed face, the jutting eyebrows under the peaked cap, had something of Cromwellian verity of purpose. The rifle and tin hat by his side were the final note.

We turned to the right, past that lovely, square, white house with its green shutters, its climbing jasmine and pigeon-haunted roof-tree, set among a bonfire of daffodils and narcissus. Spaniels rushed to meet us, noisily. That house is the Ranger's Lodge, abode of the man who directs for the Commissioners of Crown Lands the affairs of Windsor Great Park and the 15,000 acres of the Royal estate of which the Park is a part.

There are 5600 acres of woodland, heath, farms, and ponds in the Great Park. There are three farms within its confine: Flemish Farm of 450 acres, Norfolk Farm of 130 acres, and Shaw Farm of about 650 acres, farmed for the King by his farm manager, Alexander Ritchie. Norfolk Farm is so-called because in the days of George III it was highly farmed on the Norfolk system of crop-rotation. To-day it still produces wheat, roots, and seeds.

At the estate office in the big estate yard overlooking a little valley full of bracken and standing oaks I heard the full story of how these 15,000 acres of Crown lands were directed in war.

In the first place the deer were reduced from a thousand head to five hundred. The proportions are roughly one-third red deer and

two-thirds fallow deer. The red deer which one notices are bigger than those in almost any other English park except Warnham, owe their great size and grand heads to German blood. The reason for that had its roots in the Civil War. In those days every thief, bandit, and disbanded soldier raided the deer right and left. They were hunted and shot down by the dozen.

Indeed, Charles II was so put to it to maintain their numbers that he wrote pleadingly to all those gentlemen who had estates on the confines of the Crown lands begging them to preserve and give safe harbour to his disbanded deer. But finally, to increase and strengthen the stock, he had to import some from Germany. And, to-day, that gigantic strain from the Carpathian Mountains still shows its sure mark in the noble heads at Windsor.

From Windsor stock sprang many of those mighty stags which are the pride and pestilence of New Zealand to-day. The idea began with the late Prince Consort, who has left his mark on Windsor and all about it. He had two stags and four hinds caught up in the park in 1861 and shipped to New Zealand. They were 127 days at sea in the old *Triton*, but only one hind died. Their descendants are among the finest heads in the world. And to-day, at home here in Windsor, this historic herd is halved in numbers. It will be a pretty commentary if, now this war is won and Germany conquered, we bring from her, once again, stags to restore the ravages of war.

There were no sheep in the park but about a hundred cattle, mostly blue-greys and Galloways, with a few wild-looking Highlanders; the herd, however, was being increased by fifty head. Cattle are bought as yearlings and sold at Slough market and elsewhere when three years old. Venison is sold to London and locally.

Facile critics who might suggest that more of the park could be broken up for cultivation, although most of it has been, should remember that the bulk of that parkland is poor and wretched. It would cost more to reclaim, fence, and cultivate than it is worth. The little islands of cultivated land here and there in the park before the war were mute evidence of all that the experiments of the centuries had shown to be worth reclaiming. That astute monarch, George III, allowed no patch of his royal lands to feel the foot of a deer if it could grow a worthwhile blade of corn.

Forestry is a different matter. In the 1914–18 war every available tree at Windsor was cut down to make pit-props for the trenches.

The Canadian lumberjacks left their enduring mark upon the belts and coverts. The result is that to-day there is practically no softwood timber at all. There are still about three to four hundred acres of oaks fit to cut, but these have to be used for park fencing in the absence of softwoods.

What has been cut are the plantations of Weymouth and Scots pines. About 280 tons of pit wood and telegraph poles go from Windsor each month. Up until 1941 the G.P.O. had never used Weymouth pine, but Mr Eric Saville, the Deputy Ranger, persuaded them to try this excellent American importation. The result is that the orders have come again.

Weymouth pines, which were imported from America about two hundred years ago, are distinguished from ordinary Scots pine by the fact that there are five needles in a group instead of two. When young, the Weymouth has a smooth green bark instead of the rough skin of the Scots pine. Unfortunately, two American diseases came over with imported United States timber in the last war, and between them they seem to have finished the future of the Weymouth pine in this country. The primary disease is a white aphis which attacks the bark and is usually followed by a canker.

Altogether there are about ten thousand acres of woods and heath on the Windsor estate, and re-afforestation is going on at the rate of about two hundred acres a year.

Naturally no pheasants were being reared, and the stock of wild partridges is so poor that fifteen brace a day is considered a passable bag. The estate has never been good for wild pheasants in any case, owing to the fact that there is a great scarcity of natural foods in August and September, when they are most needed. Woodcock nest in fair numbers. Indeed, fourteen were shot in one day five years ago, but that is easily the best bag for some years.

As for rabbits, they have come back into their own in spite of the fact that King Edward VII gave orders that they were to be exterminated. That was in 1905, after the King had put his foot in a rabbit-hole and fallen heavily, hurting his leg rather badly.

Before 1905 they swarmed. In fact, in 1904 no less than 4285 were shot in addition to the thousands which the warreners netted and ferreted. But so well were the King's orders carried out that by 1909 to 1910 only ten rabbits were killed in the entire season. So the King sent the then Deputy Ranger a model of a silver rabbit, telling him that "There would, at any rate, be one rabbit left in the park."

To-day such rabbits as are netted and shot go to market to swell the nation's unrationed food supplies.

Shaw Farm, which lies near Frogmore and within three-quarters of a mile or so of the Castle, is the real centre of the King's own personal activities at Windsor. It embraces three farms: the Prince Consort's dairy farm, Clay Hall Farm, and Shaw Farm, which is the administrative centre. The three run to about 532 acres, plus a hundred acres or so of golf course, extending from the terrace of the Castle to beyond Adelaide Cottage, that enchanting little corner of roses, yew hedges, and quietude.

The golf course is grazed by sheep, and the rough yields about sixty tons of good sound hay yearly. Arable land on the farms does not run to more than 137 acres, but this is well and highly farmed, showing a good rotation of wheat, oats, seeds, roots, clover, and beans. It is heavy clay and loam with a little sand by the river, mostly three-horse land.

The farm buildings, which were designed by the Prince Consort, are remarkable neither for dignity nor beauty. They have a fussy, bleak Germanic quality which leaves an impression of coldness on the warmest day in summer. Perhaps that is partly because they are built of that singularly hideous Cambridge brick which, when weathered, takes on a cold grey quality. It has been the curse of half the villages in England. The style of these farm buildings is that of undistinguished rectangles surmounted by trivial towers and fussy dormers. But the yards, pens, stalls, sties, and dairy are spotless.

The dairy is unique, a museum-piece. It needs the pen of a Sitwell to immortalize its glazed, tiled, mosaiced, statuetted, and stained-glass incredibility—something between an Indian temple and a Chinese pagoda with a suggestion, in its decorative panels, of agricultural Greek. Altogether it is a remarkable monument of the Victorian age. But while it faintly amuses it is so essentially a monument of Victorianism that it deserves to be preserved for all time as an eyelet-hole into the appalling architectural mind and manner of that otherwise admirable age.

But I liked the white and Wedgwood blue panels round the walls which show the rural calendar of the seasons—sowing, harrowing, reaping, binding, the vineyard and the orchard, and the September partridge-shooter with his gun. The meeting, in one panel, of a near-eighteenth-century sportsman with a single-barrelled muzzle-loader and a couple of prancing Grecian youths in bare feet and skimpy smocks—beaters or keepers ?—is the crowning achievement.

The dairy contains a remarkably fine set of Coalport jugs, rich in colour, and two vast and intricately foliated Dresden vases presented to King George V and Queen Mary. I believe that the Duke of Windsor, when King, intended to have these Coalport jugs removed to a more honourable place in one of the palaces where they could be seen to better advantage. They certainly deserve a place worthier of their beauty and value.

To-day the dairy handles sixty to eighty gallons of milk a day, the bulk of which is consumed by the Castle and Buckingham Palace. The rest goes to the Express Dairy Company under a contract which has been in existence for about forty years.

I always like meeting Mr Alexander Ritchie, that quiet, deliberate Scot with the thoughtful face, who has managed the King's farm for more than a dozen years. Mr Ritchie is so obviously a good farmer, one of those sound Aberdeenshire men to whom farming is an exact science.

There are about two hundred head of cattle, mostly shorthorns, with a good sprinkling of Herefords, Aberdeen-Angus, Jerseys, and non-pedigree dairy shorthorns. The Aberdeen-Angus are the Queen's favourites, which is as it should be since her father, the late Lord Strathmore, was for many years one of the best breeders of them in Scotland.

I had a word with the shorthorn bull, Bapton Royal Major, a nice, short-coupled animal, a deep brilliant red in colour, with the large lambent eye and deep barrel of good breeding. He was bred by Mr J. V. Rank, sired by Bapton Air Control, and goes back to Princess Royal 35th, bred by William Marr of Aberdeen, and William of Orange, that famous shorthorn bull bred by Amos Cruickshank of Sitterton, Aberdeen, probably the most famous shorthorn breeder of all time. Bapton Royal Major took a first at the Royal Show in 1939, and in peace-time would be worth a lot of money as he stands.

The prize Hereford bull, Windsor Sultan, is home-bred. His sire, Sultan, was bought for 300 guineas at Hereford sale from Mr Jones, the noted Brecon dealer, and took two firsts at the Royal. Windsor Sultan, however, has not yet been shown.

The Aberdeen-Angus sire, Eaver of Derculich, was bred by Mr Wemyss Honnyman, of Derculich, Strathtay, and was first and Champion at Perth, where Mr Ritchie bought him for 120 guineas.

It has never been the policy at Windsor to pay fancy prices for anything. Five hundred guineas so far has been the limit, and that

was for a bull which was used and sold at a good profit. The policy of the royal farm is that of any sensible farmer—to make farming pay.

Record milkers have never been aimed at. The policy is to get good milk from cows that breed regularly and have good constitutions. Several of them give eight to nine hundred gallons a year, and one or two have touched the thousand-gallon mark. The war-time policy with beef stock was to retain the best of them for breeding to keep the herds going, and to fatten off the others in the ordinary way for meat.

There is a seventy-two-stall covered milking-yard, whose windows were then blacked out and its roof holed by a piece of shrapnel.

The sheep run to about four hundred breeding ewes, half-bred Border-Leicester-Cheviots. These have been crossed with Southdowns in the past, but for the last year or two they were crossed with Suffolks to get the bigger carcass. In addition there were about four hundred lambs, the remains of five hundred and thirty. The others had already been sold. About twenty lambs go to market each week.

It is worth noting that the Castle has never been supplied with meat from the farms since Queen Victoria's time, although there is a slaughter-house on the estate. To-day the King, the Queen, the Princesses, and the Castle staff are rationed for meat with a local butcher, exactly as is the ordinary citizen. But all butter, cream, milk, eggs, chickens, fruit, and vegetables for both Windsor and Buckingham Palace are supplied by Shaw Farm.

"We supply everything we are asked for," said Mr Ritchie quietly. The pigs and the dairy are the King's particular interest. Indeed, one autumn evening when I went round the farms he and the Queen and the two Princesses turned up unexpectedly at the farmhouse with six sandbags full of horse-chestnuts and acorns which they had gathered for the pigs from the garden paths. During hay-making the King and Queen and the Princesses are out regularly in the fields helping to make and pitch the hay.

Pigs, of which there are about a hundred, are exclusively Large and Middle Whites, run out on grass for the greater part of the year. The Middle White Boar came from Chivers of Histon, Cambridge, and the Large White Boar from Harry Bishop of Tring. Round about twenty guineas is the average price paid for a boar, and a hundred and fifty pigs are sent each year to Slough market.

We stopped and looked at several breeding sows asleep in their wooden-floored inner chambers. Then came a nice, young Middle White sow.

Most of the haulage work on the farms is done by tractor and lorry, but a couple of Shire horses still keep up the tradition of the days when fourteen or more of their kind were in full use.

The chickens, which have spacious wired-in grass runs near Blackman's Island—the willow-fringed, moated little plot of ground on which Queen Victoria's Indian servants are buried—are mostly Light Sussex, Rhode Island, and a special Windsor cross between Light Sussex and Indian Game. It has been found that this cross is far and away the best for the table, for it gives the full breast of the Indian Game with the flavour of the Sussex. About forty thousand eggs are produced a year, all of which are either consumed or sold to the people on the estate.

A certain amount of the grassland had been broken up, but in common with other farmers, the King did not expect to get much of a crop from it until the third year. Most of the grassland suffered severely from drought, but Mr Ritchie had slagged a number of fields which already began to show the full benefits.

The gardens, which are run by Mr Simpson, a hard-headed, practical Scotsman who wastes neither time nor soil, include thirty acres of kitchen gardens and many acres of lawns and shrubberies. The only flowers grown were the geraniums and roses in the flower-beds on the terrace of the Castle, but even these were being supplanted by beans, carrots, and other vegetables.

The kitchen gardens are clean, scrupulously tidy, cultivated to the uttermost Scottish detail, but no one could accuse them of beauty. Here again the prevailing white-grey brick has ruined what might so easily have been a charming succession of warm-walled, productive pleasaunces. They lie well to the sun, and are full of good well-grown fruit-trees and blushing acres of cabbages, warm beetroot, potatoes, scarlet beans, and geometrically trained wall fruit—but that eternal vista of prison-like, grey-brick walls deadens the colour in fruit and vegetables.

The Queen's garden, facing the long herbaceous border in the centre of the kitchen gardens, an herbaceous border now growing carrots, beans, and cabbages, was also put to strictly practical uses. In fact, nowhere at Windsor could I discover an acre of ground wasted or an acre put to purely ornamental purposes, other than the lawns.

Most enchanting of all in this great acreage of farms, woods, and gardens, which are the precincts of the Castle, is that eighteenth-century oasis of tiny, billowy lawns and box hedges which is the setting for Adelaide Cottage. Had I a pick of royal residences I should covet Adelaide Cottage above all else of the houses which cluster about the skirts of the Castle. Thatched and verandaed, with fat bow-windows, latticed and chintzed, its little bedroom dormers gaze from sparrow-noisy eaves with undisturbed complacency. It sits there, comfortably in the sun, hidden from the Castle beneath an escarpment of chalk, like a buxom old housekeeper in a mob cap, who has been given a corner of the garden in which to sun herself and await eternity.

I do not know who lives in this gentle little house with its mop of thatch, but I am quite sure that the ghost of Queen Adelaide takes tea on summer afternoons and that wraithly royal children play spectral hide-and-seek in the June sun among its box hedges and rose-walks.

It is supremely the garden cottage of the picturesque. That other garden cottage within the walls of the kitchen gardens, where the King and Queen sometimes sit and take tea and gaze on the once-herbaceous borders, now filled with regiments of beets and battalions of carrots, is a chill, grey place by comparison.

Its Victorian dog pictures match its uncomfortable Sheraton chairs. That unaccountable piece of red Lebanon cedar dated 1862, which rests bleakly on a shelf for no particular reason, is mated by a glass-fronted cupboard full of silver spades with which kings, queens, and royal dukes have planted trees.

Its windows gaze on acres of potatoes and billows of glass houses; the symbol of Windsor, sternly practical in war.

No. I will go back in mind and memory to Adelaide Cottage, dozing in the sun, with its memories of eighteenth-century peace.

XVI. LITTLE HITLERS ON THE FARMS

The W.A.E.C.'s must go—Rural Squander-bugs and Tyrants—How They were Secretly chosen—Their Extravagance and Waste—Ten Thousand Evictions, Suicides, and Broken Hearts—A Scandal of the First Order

> Sweet is the name of Liberty, but the thing itself a value beyond all inestimable treasure . . . the inestimable treasure is the use of it in this House. . . . God mislikes these double-dealing gentlemen, and there are many eyes that to their great shame behold their double dealings.
>
> *Extract from the famous speech of Peter Wentworth, M.P., in defence of the liberty of the subject against bureaucracy and absolutism, House of Commons, February 8, 1576, for which he was sent to the Tower*

> Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.
>
> LORD ACTON

"THE ENGLISH," ONCE SAID LORD WAVELL, "HAVE A GENIUS for improvisation." He might have added that they do not, however, put up with makeshifts or with injustice for long.

Many County War Agricultural Committees are notorious cases in point. They were improvised and many remain makeshifts. They had almost absolute power and they used it, in some instances, in a manner dangerously near corruption, in others arbitrarily with little regard for the elements of justice. The time has come when a more satisfactory and less arbitrary and expensive method of overseeing the farming industry must be devised, if indeed any overseeing is necessary at all.

Some of the Committees have done good work in stimulating and educating farmers in the high-pressure production of maximum food supplies in war-time. They have drained and reclaimed tens of thousands of acres of land which had been either waterlogged, bushed-up, or lain derelict for years. Much of such work has been done at prohibitive costs which no private individual or Drainage Board answerable to the ratepayers would ever have incurred. That, however, is part of the price the taxpayer must pay for giving the Committees almost unlimited power and unlimited money to spend.

Many excellent and high-minded farmers and landowners have given thousands of hours of their expert attention to the direction of the Committees—unpaid.

Much of this is worthy of commendation. But there lurk niggers in these rural wood-piles. Farmers and country people have a mounting catalogue of sins, commissions, and omissions which they charge to the War Agricultural Executive Committees.

(1) Tyranny and bullying of small farmers who are scarcely represented on most Committees.

(2) Evictions from houses and land *without the right of appeal to an independent tribunal*, and with resultant loss of personal goodwill.[1]

(3) Too many ignorant officials. Many without previous farming experience. Others include too many men who have failed at farming and snatch at the chance of a salaried post. Many others are young men with an entirely theoretical training at an agricultural 'college' who proudly affix a dreary alphabet after their names and presume to teach local men with local knowledge their jobs.

(4) Favouritism and jobbery, particularly where more than one member of a family or firm is on a Committee or employed by it.

(5) Waste of public money and petrol.

(6) Overstaffing and extravagant office accommodation.

(7) Inefficient 'shop-window' farming and over-ploughing of valuable grasslands in order to make impressive book entries.

(8) Too many complicated and contradictory Orders.

(9) *No public accounting of the public monies they spend.*

Not all Committees are as black as the system is sometimes painted, for the simple reason that the powers given to the Ministry are so wide and the Ministry's original guidance on procedure to the Committees was so vague that almost anything, good or bad, can happen under the ægis of a Committee. It all depends on the men who make the Committees and the 'officers' who work for them.

[1] Since this was written the present Labour Minister of Agriculture, Mr Tom Williams, has announced the setting up of a number of tribunals to which farmers may appeal against eviction orders. No past evictions will, however, be reconsidered or annulled.

The Committees were conceived in a curiously un-English manner in 1939. Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, then Minister of Agriculture, wrote to all Lords-Lieutenant and Land Commissioners asking them to suggest men in each county to act as Chairmen of Committees and Chief Executive Officers. Most of these chairmen *nominated* their shadow committees in secret. Not one was elected—the very negation of democracy. It was an unparalleled open door for friends, business acquaintances, clients, and opportunists. It threw that door wide open to jobbery, favouritism, nepotism, and eventually, through the powers invested in the Committees, to petty tyranny and the ventilation of local feuds and parochial spite. Local busybodies, 'failed' M.P.'s, and the ubiquitous Pooh-bahs who love to have a finger in every rural pie, were able to flaunt authority, use petrol, and order their neighbours about.

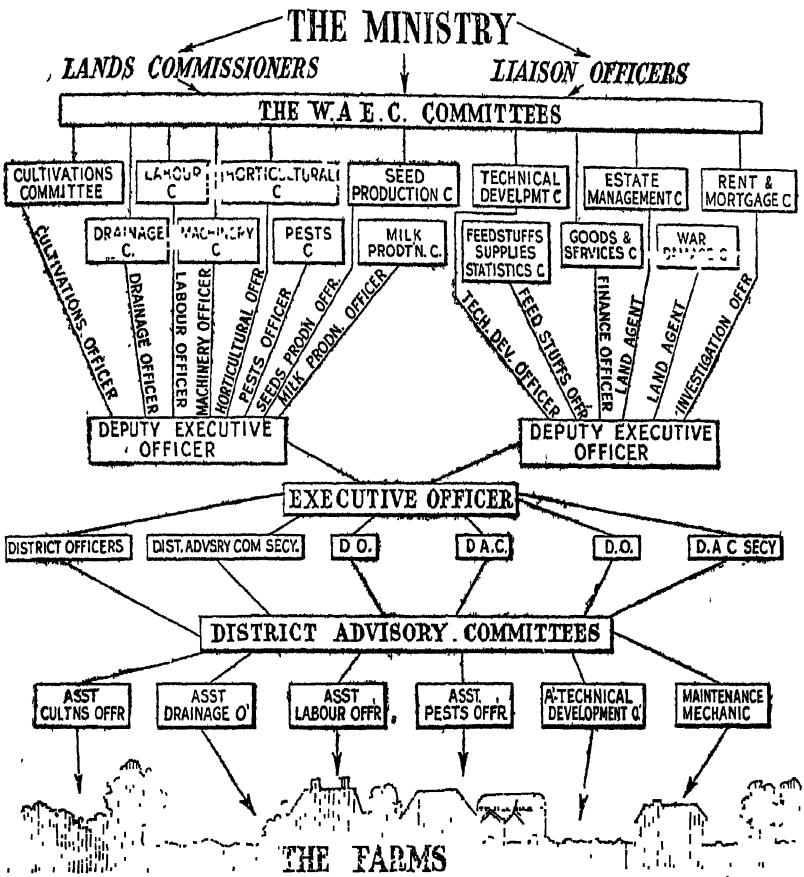
The system is almost without parallel in English history—the creation of a Star Chamber in each county with powers which abrogate the spirit and much of the letter of Magna Carta, with a modern Gestapo in attendance. Paid officials sprang up overnight in thousands. Some had no practical farming experience. Others had gone bankrupt at it. Some were mere go-betweens and middlemen—auctioneers and estate agents, seedsmen, ex-higglers and dealers, even ex-M.F.H.'s and ex-publicans. I know some Committeemen and several officials who are near-illiterate.

Almost any official is now an 'officer,' and all consider themselves 'experts.' Their jargon is laughable. A rat-catcher is a Pest Control Officer and a rook-scarer a Corvine Operator! Many have businesses and interests, such as estate agencies and corn-and-seed shops which can obviously benefit by being "in the know." The result is an intolerable octopus. Every tentacle has a dozen or more 'suckers' attached.

This state of affairs was due to the fact that the Ministry of Agriculture gave no lead in organization, little guidance as to procedure, and certainly no blue print to go on. The counties had to work it out for themselves—without the farmer being able to elect the men who were to control his destiny and even his home and goodwill. Hence the wide differences in treatment, expenditure, and complaints.

To-day the five thousand or so committee-men in the sixty-two counties of England and Wales have evicted not less than ten thousand farmers from their homes and holdings in part or entirety.

THE BURDEN ON THE FARMER'S BACK



ORGANIZATION OF THE WAR AGRICULTURAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES

This chart illustrates the intolerable incubus of committee men and "officers" inflicted on agriculture. Their secret expenses are inflicted on the taxpayers in general.

By kind permission of the Editor of "The Farmer and Stockbreeder"

Probably more. Mr Hudson was very bashful about giving the figures during his term of office. The Committees 'farm,' or have dispossessed farmers from, tens of thousands of acres.

The scope and bitterness of the complaints are due in the first place to the abnormally wide and dictatorial powers given to the Minister of Agriculture, for whom the Committees act as agents. The Committees are accused of dictatorial misuse of those powers, scandalous waste of public money, and failure to show profit-and-loss accounts of their stewardship in spite of repeated demands in Parliament.

True, the Auditor General did extract the illuminating admission that up to 1941 the Committees had spent nearly £6,000,000, of which not less than £2,500,000 had gone on salaries, office rents, and 'administration,' that cloak which hides a multitude of bureaucratic sins. A mere miserable £237,000 had been spent on farm fertilizers, the very ammunition of the farm!

Since then their finances have been kept secret, but Lord Beaverbrook has told me that it is estimated that the Committees are now spending approximately £25,000,000 to £40,000,000 a year. Do they produce £25,000,000 worth of food?

That is the question to ask these rural squander-bugs. Their parentage was promiscuous, their birth haphazard, and their progeny are profligate.

The main criticisms against the Committee system, however, are, first, that Committees should *not* act as farmers when there are plenty of efficient farmers ready and willing to farm the land, and, further, that much of the land farmed by Committees is cultivated extravagantly and often foolishly. I heard, for example, of a field of 'wheat' sown by the Essex Committee which, when it came up, turned out to be white turnips. This was because the bags of seed were mixed up by inexperienced labour supervised by an 'officer' with no previous practical farming experience. It would never have happened had a real farmer been there at the time.

Secondly, many Committees are accused of a selfish waste of labour and machinery on their own farming operations when farmers can get neither. Committees have first call on all available labour through the local Labour Exchanges and can, and do, pool supplies of farm machinery and tools as they become available from American and British factories. Farmers complain that Committee labour, both men and land girls, is squandered in a most wasteful

manner and that applications for labour either remain unanswered for days or weeks or that the labour is nearly all absorbed by the Committee's own farms or by those of their friends.

The Essex Committee, probably the most expensive in the country, which dispossessed many farmers, 'farmed' until recently no less than forty thousand acres and employed directly and indirectly five thousand workers, many of whom are conscientious objectors. It was estimated to cost the taxpayer approximately £1,000,000 a year as against about £300,000 for Norfolk, a larger county with far fewer complaints.

The Essex Committee evicted so many farmers—and women—from their lands and homes that the Essex Farmers' and Countrymen's Association was formed in 1943 to ventilate injustices.

And here it is worth telling the story of how that Association was born and what it succeeded in doing.

On a bright morning in May 1943 I received a letter from a man I did not know. It read:

> We are in great distress in this parish because the Essex War Agricultural Committee have taken a most high-handed attitude towards several farmers here, and are threatening evictions, which apparently they have the power to carry out. I have just finished reading your book *Farming Adventure*, and in it you have exposed this form of pressure and the powers of these people in a most courageous manner. We need a leader here, one who will write and speak against these injustices, as many in this parish are frightened that they may lose their homes and livelihood. Will you come and see us and give us your advice?
>
> Yours truly,
> J. R. WILSON
> *Rector*
>
> PELDON, ESSEX

Now, Peldon is an old-world Essex village of barge-boarded and plastered cottages. It sits on a hill gazing over green miles of marshes to the sea and the winding creeks. Mersea Island and Ray Island, that "haunted isle" of which Baring-Gould wrote in *Mahalah*, lie in the middle foreground, humped with trees, amid gleaming mudflats and shining creeks. Peldon lives by farming. It has always lived by the plough and the milking-stool, save when its sons went to sea. And between Peldon and the salt-creeks lie some thousands of acres of grass-marshes. They had been down to grass for fifty years or more, ever since the ungoverned flood of cheap, subsidized foreign food drove English ploughshares out of

English earth. I had heard rumours that the Essex Committee was planning to plough up all these marshes between the Crouch and the Colne and turn them into a grandiose ' Committee farm,' a sort of farming super-show-window to which the Committee and Mr Hudson might bear-lead the Press and extol their own agricultural works.

The fact that there were plenty of good farmers in Essex able and willing to farm these acres under the plough, provided that they were given the tools, the labour, and the fertilizers, was not taken into account. Farmer-owners and tenants were evicted, and we then had the perfect picture of high-powered Committee farming, by which at least one man openly boasted that he would earn a knighthood and at least one jackal of an official hoped for the same debased honour.

I had just come from Liverpool, where I had addressed meetings of Liverpool and Manchester cotton merchants and business men on " The Menace of Bureaucracy " in the Picton Hall and another meeting of the Merseyside Contractors' Federation on the same subject. I had seen at first-hand how some officials of the Cotton Control and Cotton Board and big master-builders were trying to use their war-time powers to swallow up their lesser competitors and hamstring their businesses. This was the agricultural end of the same poisonous stick.

It is an odd and humiliating commentary on human nature that while war brings out the highest degree of valour and self-sacrifice in those who fight, it also generates the lowest forms of greed and self-aggrandisement among many who stay at home and order their fellow-beings about. Farming had no lack of these petty parasites. And just as Liverpool and Manchester were busy hatching their shoddy crop of dreadful knights—one of whom at least could not even speak English decently—so Essex and many another county had its pretentious little seekers after sullied ' honours.' It was reminiscent, in a minor way, of the state of affairs at the end of the last war when Lloyd George was responsible for the creation of so many dubious honours to men of the lowest financial and moral character—some of whom ended in gaol—that a Royal Commission on Honours was set up to purge this evil trafficking.

So, reading this courageous parson's letter, I got on my horse and rode eight miles across country to Peldon Rectory, to find a clean-shaven, humorous-eyed man with a firm jaw, an aristocratic face,

the incisive manner of a good lawyer, the air of a man of the world.

In the rectory were assembled twenty-five to thirty people—a typical English village gathering. There was a local lady farmer, Mrs Greer, of Blind Knights, tweed-clad, her dog-cart in the drive. There were the local farmers, Mr Ted Hutley, of Brick House; Mr Butt, of Barn Hall, and his brother of Peldon Marshes, who farmed five hundred acres of marshes; my old yeoman friend, Tom Mann, of Virley Hall, bluff and keen-eyed, looking as though he had a gun in his pocket for any official who troubled him; Captain Sergeant, a local retired officer; Mr Mortimer, of Abbotts Hall, who farmed seven hundred acres of grass-marsh; Mr Prior, the village postmaster; ten or a dozen small farmers and smallholders—the sort of whom, a year before, Mr Hudson had declared to me, "They should be abolished—they're uneconomic"—a dairyman, a publican, a retired police sergeant, half a dozen farmers' wives, and Miss Griffiths, a friend of Mrs Greer; and, oddest of all, an old Fleet Street friend of twenty years before, John Thornton, of Gobolts, now managing director of a well-known publicity firm which had invested some of its profits in buying Essex farmlands.

They told their story. How farmer after farmer had been given notice to quit without any good reason at all and without any possibility of appeal to an independent tribunal. How orders to break up rough old grassland had been served and how, when the necessary machinery was appealed for, it was not forthcoming. How overbearing Committee men and officials—two of whom at least had never served in the last war but had thriven prosperously—had told these bewildered farmers and their wives that the Committee possessed all but the power of life and death over them.

Now, in passing, I would observe that it is nearly always the dealers and ex-dealers and the cunning little go-betweens who make rural trouble. Dealers are the pawnbrokers of agriculture. They flourish on farmers' misfortunes. A dealer welcomes hard times because he can buy at bankrupt prices and wait to get his own price when things improve. As a class they are almost invariably mean-spirited and cowardly, and, like Germans, veer from servility to arrogance as occasion demands. You can usually tell a dealer's farm because it is nearly always grass, almost invariably full of a constantly moving population of horses and cattle, frequently untidy, and *seldom grows corn.* The dealer is no producer. He is a middleman, a parasite. Corn-growing is integrally too honest and laborious a work for such men.

I was not surprised to find ex-dealers at the bottom of much of the trouble in various places.

Had there been more men of birth, responsibility, and education on the Committee we might have seen more fair justice and less pompous tyranny. But the few local squires on it were outvoted. That is part of the price which the countryside pays for the uprooting by taxation of landed families. For centuries they gave good leadership and saw justice done in local affairs. When the demagogue supplants the squire and the dealer-in-office ousts the educated gentleman or responsible farmer in rural affairs then good-bye to local amity and that spirit of neighbourliness which has been the mainstay of village life in the past. Avarice, tyranny, and the ventilation of petty feuds are the inevitable consequence of giving executive power to men who, unlike a landed squire, have much to gain, little to lose, and no sense of leadership.

At that meeting I suggested that those present form themselves into an association, agree to rules, elect a chairman and committee, and generally put themselves on a responsible basis. They did so. Seventy-five pounds was subscribed at once. Rules were drafted. A committee was elected. The rector and Mr Prior, the postmaster, who became honorary secretary, and others worked like blacks. To Mr Prior especially the newly-born Essex Farmers' and Countrymen's Association owed an immense debt, for he went all over the county to investigate abuses and advise persecuted farmers.

A week later we took the ballroom at that magnificent Tudor inn, the Red Lion in Colchester, and sent a loudspeaker van to tour the market-place, and I had the privilege of addressing between two and three hundred farmers who unanimously passed a resolution calling for a Government inquiry into the "high-handed and dictatorial methods, injustices, and waste of public money by the Essex War Agricultural Committee."

Of course we did not get an inquiry. No one expected one. But we did get a good Press. London and provincial newspapers 'splashed' this first organized revolt against a tyranny and waste of public money of which most country people were aware but against which few had dared to protest.

A year before, it is true, I had written an article exposing the main abuses of the whole racket which the *Daily Mail* published under the title of "Little Hitlers on the Farm." I received letters from all over the country agreeing with, and substantiating, my charges. Two days later I walked into the office of that splendid

journalist, R. J. Prew, who was then Editor, and said, " Bob, I've got a few letters agreeing with the attack on the W.A.E.C.'s. You might like to see them."

" Good! " said he, " I've had the Ministry of Agriculture on the 'phone denying the whole story, and also the H.Q. of the National Farmers' Union. They want me to publish a withdrawal. Give me those letters." I gave them. The *Daily Mail* published no withdrawal.

Twenty-four hours after that Colchester meeting Lord Beaverbrook rang me at my London flat. For seven early years I had served him and R.D.B.[1] and learned my journalism at their twin feet of wisdom.

" What's all this, Jimmy ? " said that well-known nasal voice. " I hear you're going for the War Agricultural Committee! "

" Trying to," said I.

" Good! " rasped his gnomish lordship. " Give 'em hell! They deserve it. Go for 'em all! The whole system's rotten and bad—costing the country twenty-five to forty millions a year. Give 'em hell! Good luck to you! If you want any help ring me up." And he rang off. Beaverbrook never forgets those who were with him in the early days. Nor do we forget the man to whom we owe so much in early inspiration.

That meeting was the first of several. We held one at Maldon, where Alfred fought the Danes in that great three-day battle against tyranny; at Braintree, where, because we promised to produce on the platform a blind man who had been threatened with eviction, no eviction took place; at Mersea Island, where we exposed the Committee's folly in placing a machinery dump within a hundred yards of the sea and tip-and-run raiders, whereafter they removed it, and at other places where local opinion and injustices demanded it.

The answer was a swift, unheralded, and certainly unsung, visit by Mr Hudson to Peldon. Soon afterwards matters improved considerably.

So much for a local revolt which gained powerful and instantaneous support and prevented any further evictions. In one case the W.A.E.C. had already summoned a small farmer for not paying the charges demanded of him for their labour and machinery in *ploughing in his growing crops*. They withdrew the case at the last moment in the police court itself—a *volte face* which earned the just censure of the magistrate. Elsewhere, the mere whisper of an

[1] R. D. Blumenfeld, Chairman of the *Daily Express*.

impending meeting with its resultant Press publicity was enough to ensure that the threatened men remained in their holdings. If these small moral victories could be won in what was no more than a village revolt in an obscure corner of England, why not elsewhere? Bureaucrats are terrified of newspaper publicity, more still of questions in the House of Commons. We gave them both. I shall be grateful always to Mr John Loverseed, then Common Wealth M.P. for Eddisbury, for the courageous manner in which he raised this whole question of the W.A.E.C.'s abuse of their powers (*Hansard*, June 8, 1944) in spite of repeated attempts by the Ministry of Agriculture to stymie him. I am no supporter of Common Wealth, and Mr Loverseed has since resigned his membership of that ideology of the half-baked, but it is to their credit that they tackled this abuse when few Conservative M.P.'s had the moral courage to do so.

Of all the many letters which I received from many other English counties, one which will always remain in my memory was from the wife of a seventy-year-old dairy farmer. She wrote:

> I must write and thank you on behalf of us small farmers. My husband has been farming for fifty years through good and bad times, and we have always made a living off our few acres and have two good boys in the Army, one in the East.
>
> Yet our Committee threatened to put us out of our home into the road simply because we had not the tackle or the labour to plough up our big grass-marsh. They said they couldn't lend us any, though they have all the tackle they want for their own farming.
>
> It has preyed on my husband's mind so much that he does not sleep at nights—just tosses and mutters beside me and is all jumpy. He is like a haunted man.
>
> I dread him going to milk at five in the morning unless I go with him *in case I should find him hanging in the barn* like that poor farmer we read of in the paper. He has had suicide in his face for days. A wife knows.
>
> Now all the stir the papers are making seems to have made them drop their idea of turning us out, so I feel I had to write and thank you and Mr Prior and all of you.

That letter should be read by all who have also read the W.A.E.C.'s grandiloquent accounts of their own farming-without-costings. It is typical of the mental anguish of thousands of small and inarticulate farmers in this country who have been bullied and persecuted by the minions of Mr Hudson's arrogant system.

Here are two other examples of the manner in which some of the Committee men and officials of that Committee, which I honestly believe to be the worst in England, behaved. The chair at the meeting in the Braintree Corn Exchange was taken by an eminent local farmer, Mr Thomas Tod. Mr Tod is the best type of Scots farmer, thoroughly efficient and conscientious. He had never had any trouble personally with the Committee, nor had his farming methods been criticized by them. He simply joined the Association and formed a local branch because he was indignant at the unjust manner in which some of his neighbours, most of them smaller men, were being harried. The night after the meeting a Committee official called on Mr Tod and said, "Why did you take the chair at this meeting?"

"That's my business," said Mr Tod. "I don't like to see injustice on my neighbours' doorsteps."

"Very well," said the official. "We'll pay you a visit next year! Your beans may not be such a good crop after all! I'll keep an eye on you!"

This blackmailing abuse of power was duplicated in the case of Mrs ——, of —— Priory, a lovely old house surrounded by some three hundred acres of land which she and her husband had farmed successfully for years.

Two Committee men called on Mrs —— and told her that her dairy herd must be culled. Now, this herd was of Dexters, with an exceptionally high milk-yield and many prizes to their credit.

"But you haven't seen the herd or the milk-yields," she protested.

"We don't want to. You do as we tell you! And, moreover, you've got to plough up so many acres of grass."

Mrs —— replied with spirit that her husband had already ploughed up over a hundred and fifty acres without being ordered to do so, and that she was not going to be dictated to in that unmannerly way in her own house.

"Your own house indeed!" snorted one of these rural Himmlers. "Do you know we've got the power to throw you out of your house neck and crop, and if you give me any more sauce, I'll do it!"

Sure enough, two different sets of inquiring house-hunters arrived the following week-end, saying that they understood that the house would shortly be for sale. They explained that they had been sent by a firm of estate agents who had given them to understand that this was so. Mrs —— promptly threatened to send the

whole story to the local Member of Parliament and to Mr Churchill. She is still in —— Priory.

I give these local stories as examples of the danger to freedom which is invested in the extraordinary war-time powers given to Mr Hudson's Ministry and delegated by him to Committees which too often contain men utterly unfitted to exercise them by experience, education, or even common honesty. It is a matter of paramount importance to the whole future of country life and agriculture. These powers must be repealed at the first possible moment.

At least one eviction in Essex was followed by a suicide, that of Mr McKerracher, a middle-aged and well-liked Scot, who had farmed for years, through all the bad period, at Ewell Hall, near Kelvedon. He drowned himself.

In another case a widow of sixty-six, Mrs Brown, of Hill Farm, Lamarsh, mother of two serving sons, was evicted from her cottage, after her few acres had been taken, the doors and windows nailed up, and her furniture put out in the road. She was only saved from the workhouse by Mr H. W. Cook, Chairman of the Parish Council, who described the action of the officials as " worse than German." [1]

Such unbridled acts of petty tyranny have happened and can still happen all over England. The system has created a state of irritation and ill-will which is a definite handicap to the farmers' war effort. I have a file full of complaints—and admissions that many farmers are afraid to complain publicly because they fear victimization. This is Nazism at home.

The Committees' powers can be used with so little discrimination,

[1] COPY OF SWORN STATEMENT RELATING TO AN EVICTION BY THE ESSEX WAR AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEE

On the 23rd November, 1942, at about 9.45 A.M. Mr Chalmers and Mr Pentley came with several policemen and farm labourers to Hill Farm, Lamarsh, our own freehold property, and asked if I had anywhere to put the furniture as they intended to clear the house. They had taken all the land—twenty-six acres of cultivated land—in February, 1941, and the remainder, fifty acres, that I had let to Mr Pengrum, of Wickford, for cattle grazing. He had about twenty heifers which had to be sold, and I was compelled to return to him £18 which he had paid me two weeks previously.

When I said that I had nowhere to go they began to put my home and that of my son in motor lorries and on the road, and some of this remained on the road for three days.

Mr Cook, the Billeting Officer, came and said that he had never heard of such treatment for an elderly woman who was worn out from work, as I had my house packed with evacuees until they could be found accommodation. I was sixty-six on the 26th November, and am the guardian of my soldier-son's two boys. He is a widower. The police sergeant from Haddington told Mr Cook that he was an old village gossip and if he did not get out he would b—— well put him where he could find him. They said they would take my grandsons, aged ten and eleven years, and place them in Braintree Institution. Mr Cook put me and the children and some furniture into two rooms at Lightlands, and now I have to answer

and without correction, that they can evict a man not only from his land but his house; ruin his goodwill; put in whom they like in his place, their own relatives included; pool machinery and allocate it *to whom they like;* plough up grass which is more valuable as pasture; buy corn and seeds from friends and associates of Committee men; spend public money without giving a public account of it, and give orders to plough up and *withhold the machinery necessary to carry out the orders.* I know of at least one such case which I reported to Mr Hudson—without justice being done to the farmer. They can even forbid a man to shoot rabbits on his own land when it is overrun with them. Delays and procrastination are daily routine.

Many of the complaints are directed against sub-Committee men, some of whom are accused of using their " powers of recommendation " (*i.e.*, for eviction) to pay off old scores in village feuds.

I have visited many farms throughout East Anglia, Wales, the South, the Midlands, and Lincolnshire in the last three years, travelling over ten thousand miles, and have heard of, and seen, some incredible examples of bureaucratic waste, dictatorship, and inefficiency. While some complaints by palpably inefficient men of the rural squatter type may be discounted, the fact remains that many Committees have cornered labour and machinery and ' farmed ' apparently for their own official aggrandisement.

Specific instances of wasteful and inefficient farming methods in various counties, brought to my own notice, include the case of fifteen men employed to ' brush ' half an acre of grass at Salcott, in Essex. These men were brought from some miles away, in a lorry, and taken back at night—a waste of men, time, and petrol.

a summons at Sudbury and pay £9 19*s.* 4*d.* for being there, and am ordered to remove my goods. I had appealed to Mr Leslie and also to Mr Butler, M.P., and on the Saturday previous I went to the Superintendent of Police at Colchester for advice, and he told me that I could not be turned out, but only by an order of the Court. I did not see a warrant or order, at any time after putting the furniture out, which furniture had almost been broken. Mr Pentley nailed the door from the inside and got out through the window, saying that it was a State-controlled house, and that if we returned we should be arrested.

My daughter, Mrs Good, was a witness to all that happened.

Mrs Elle Brown has sworn this to be a true statement before me this day the 13th September 1943.

E. P. ALGER
Justice of the Peace, Essex

At Seagry Road, Wanstead, E.11

This statement is supported by Mr H. W. Cook, of Lamarsh (Bures 2537), Chairman of the Parish Council, who stated: "I did not believe such things were possible in England. The behaviour of the officials was positively German."

To Mr J. Wentworth Day, on October 17, 1943

In the same parish my informant said that he saw three land girls take twenty minutes to pull three thistles! They came each day in a motor-van, and one girl invariably spent the greater part of the day cleaning the van and making tea. Another land girl who was in charge of chickens did not feed them because she "thought the old hen did that." Such waste would not occur if this labour was billeted on the farm and working directly under the farmer's eye and personal guidance.

On another Essex farm Committee workers built a haystack too big at the bottom, so two lorry-loads were sent from a village thirteen miles away with ten land girls *on each lorry*, in order to pack the stack out. No good farmer would have allowed the initial mistake to be made or have wasted petrol and twenty girls' labour on such an expensive journey.

As to the waste of 'pooled' machinery, this is a sore point in many counties.

Many complaints have been received of good crops of growing hay and corn being ploughed in within a few days of their being ready for cutting, simply because Committee officials wished the land to be ploughed up to swell their book entries. Either they could not be bothered to arrange their ploughing programmes properly, or they were farming too much to be able to do it efficiently.

On two Essex farms which I visited the Committee had ploughed in three cartloads of *cut* clover on a six-acre field after refusing to allow the farmer to cart it to feed his stock. They also ploughed in six acres of tares, five and a half acres of beans, and six acres of wheat, five weeks before they were due to be harvested. The farmer, who took over the farms four years ago when they were derelict, tells me that whereas they had only produced two sacks of corn to the acre, he raised the yield to four quarters of barley and five quarters of wheat and was willing to do all that the Committee ordered and pay all the expenses. His offer was refused.

I myself saw eight acres of good hay and ten acres of fairish wheat ploughed in a few days before both were ready to cut.

In Lincolnshire I heard of £22,000 worth of lucerne being ploughed in on the Blankney estate because the W.A.E.C. wanted the land put down to wheat. In "the shires" I was told that between forty and fifty acres of potatoes were left in the ground by the W.A.E.C. till March 1943—a clear waste of between four and five hundred tons of good food. In the same county the W.A.E.C.

left stacks of artificials in sacks lying by the roadside for twelve months—a waste of sacks, which are scarce, and of fertilizers. At a Committee repair shop, said my informant, "I have seen men standing idle for days on end while I was begging for a man to put the drum right on my threshing tackle."

Yet as an example of how a good farmer can make derelict land pay, provided he has labour and machinery, Mr Horace Burgess, of Welbourn Manor, Sleaford, took two thousand to three thousand tons of corn, potatoes, and peas off eight hundred acres of previously derelict land—work which a War Agricultural Committee would probably have done at a cost of thirty pounds an acre at least.

Much of the waste of labour and money is due to the fact that some Committee men, and many of the paid officials, had no previous practical farming experience. One such sub-Committee, for example, consists of one good farmer, two part-time farmers, a solicitor, an iron-founder, and a yarn-spinner. One paid 'officer' had previously failed for £7000 as a farmer.

These are, perhaps, minor indications of some of the causes of the growing irritation against W.A.E.C. control in many counties.

Good farmers could have produced the same good results with half the waste of money and labour provided they had been given the tools and the men, the fertilizers and the petrol and some of the money which the Committees have used so lavishly themselves.

Lord Northbourne, himself a practical farmer and chairman of a district committee of the Kent W.A.E.C., declared in an article in *Country Life* on June 19, 1942, that the same results (*i.e.*, in food production) could have been secured by the farmers without the creation of any Committees at all. This view is shared by many responsible farmers. Most, however, take the view that since the Committees are here for the duration they must be 'put up with.'

The whole system, in fact, is overdue for abolition. *You cannot farm by committee* any more than a ship can be sailed by a committee.

All Committee men and officials who have shown themselves unduly ignorant of farming or oppressive should be retired. All who can be proved to have profited financially by their office should be prosecuted. Not more than one member of a family or firm should be allowed to serve on or for a Committee. All profit-and-loss accounts for each county should be made public in spite of the Minister's notable reluctance to do so. Then we should know if we are getting our money's worth.

All men of military age should be combed out and put in the

Services. Others, without previous farming experience, should be put to work for which they are more suited.

Finally, when the aftermath of war is over, the whole top-heavy, haphazard, expensive system should be scrapped. Its legacy of extravagance, ill-will, and bitterness is not worth inheritance.

The County Councils, with their elected representation, their local knowledge, and proved traditions, can better act as mentors to farmers in whatever degree of direction may be needed.

The W.A.E.C.'s must go the way of the Nazis whom many of them have aped.

Not one countryman in a hundred wants the Committee system to continue after the war. They say that if control is to be exercised in agriculture it should be in the hands of the County Council Association, who are elected men with local knowledge. Farming from Whitehall must cease.

Equally, if the prices to farmers are to be dependent on Government control of the industry they claim that it is only fair and right that the costs of Government farming by Committees should be made public.

The system is altogether too loosely responsible, top-heavy, and expensive to be an economic asset to the industry or the nation. The powers conferred on individuals and the lack of central directions or restraint are such that one or two tyrannically minded Committee men, or over-officious 'officers' swollen with their own sense of petty importance, can create ill-will, waste much money, and completely nullify public appreciation of the good work which may have been done by the Committee in other ways.

Here are matters of the first importance to the future of our food and our agriculture—the mother of all industry. Meanwhile the unfortunate taxpayer sees

> The fount of paper money poured
> To glut the insatiable horde
> Of smug tax-eaters, lawyers, bankers,
> And city squires, the worm that cankers
> The rose of England, overblown.

If we substitute 'officers' for city squires we have the perfect picture of "the worm that cankers."

Let me give one example of the sensitiveness of officials to any sort of criticism.

In November 1944 I was invited by the Newark Branch of the National Farmers' Union to address them on the question, "Is

Nationalization of the Land Worth While?" I pointed out that national *control* of the land already existed through the Committees and that 'National farming' was exemplified in their extravagant experiments—with no profit-and-loss accounts published. I quoted various examples of hardship and injustice caused by the system, and emphasized that under nationalization neither the farmer nor anyone else could be able to fulfil that fundamental human ambition —the ownership of a plot of land—and that the tenant farmer would not, in any case, be able to pick and choose his landlord. In all probability his 'case-sheet' would follow him wherever he went and his labour would be hand-picked, 'directed,' bullied by forms and officials. His life would, in fine, be a red-tape-ridden, robot existence.

This brought the massed forces of the local War Agricultural Committee to their feet in self-defence. From the Chief Executive Officer downward they loudly protested their innocence and proclaimed their good works.

Yet next day a man intimately connected with local agriculture called on me and said, "You were quite right. They are not a bad Committee as Committees go, because they have a good chairman in Alderman Taylor, who keeps the officials to heel, but their farming is often wasteful."

The plain truth is that this is no local or sporadic grievance. It is a nation-wide scandal, and one which must be remedied if freedom and goodwill are to be part of country life. The Committees were ill-conceived. They are not based on principles of justice, and they do not administer it. *They set themselves above the usual law of the land inasmuch as they are accusers, prosecutors, judges, juries, and executioners. That is the plain and inexcusable fact of the situation.*

More than ten thousand farmers, according to Mr Craven Ellis, M.P., in the House of Commons on January 6, 1945, have already been evicted *without any right of appeal to an independent tribunal.*

Yet Mr Hudson in his reply said that in his "honest and sincere opinion" not one of those evictions had been unjustified. Either, then, there are ten thousand criminally bad farmers in this country or Mr Hudson's secretly chosen Committee men and Service-dodging officials are infallible supermen, beyond reproach.

The plain fact is that Mr Hudson himself was to blame. Small wonder that in the House of Commons my friend, Sir Edward Grigg,[1] that shrewd and experienced Parliamentarian, exclaimed of

[1] Now Lord Altrincham.

Mr Hudson that he was " horrified " that so comparatively young and inexperienced a Minister should have taken so dictatorial a tone. Mr Hudson was given overriding war-time powers which were not interpreted wisely, nor had he apparently the moral courage to accept the blame for the errors and injustices of his arbitrary and ignorant minions.

He was aided in this apparent glorification of the benefits of the work done by the Committees and in ignoring their waste and injustices by the fact that his Ministry paid for an extensive Press publicity service. It employed—and probably still does—no less than sixty-one Press officials to give out to the under-staffed daily and weekly papers items of news and facts relating to agriculture. This service is used, however, largely to praise and glorify the work done by the Committees, its officials, and the vast horde of agricultural professors, scientists, and other salaried products of provincial universities, agricultural ' colleges,' and commercially interested firms who are either employed by or loaned to the Ministry. Few, if any, of these pundits, have ever farmed for a living.

Yet this superfluity of professors and diplomaed youths with receding chins and protruding spectacles are for ever lecturing the farmer as though he had never farmed an acre in his life.

The sum-total of this intensive propaganda was to glorify the Minister himself, to tell the country that Mr Hudson himself was a heaven-born farmer and that, thanks to him and his Committees, the nation was fed in war-time. Nothing could be further from the truth. The British farmer who is born and brought up to farming and knows his land, his stock, and his men and their capabilities is the man who has grown the food—*not* the Committees, and certainly not Mr Hudson. Yet the ex-Minister, in order obliquely to focus the spotlight on his Committees and thereby on himself, was never tired of referring to the ' inefficient ' British farmer. ' Inefficiency ' has a big-business board-room ring, the invaluable word which is called into use when a works has to be closed down or an office boy sacked. Mr Hudson and his Committees have made the British farmer an office boy.

Unfortunately this spate of ready-cooked, ready-digested ' farming news ' has been too eagerly snapped up by certain agricultural correspondents of daily and weekly papers who find that it halves their work since they need only rewrite the typewritten ' hand-outs ' in their own language. I doubt if some of these ' experts ' ever visit a farm except on a Ministerial conducted tour

with a guide to spoon-feed them. Certain provincial newspapers also find it cheap and convenient to accept a weekly agricultural article, either direct from the Ministry or from a local Committee official. This all obscures the truth, deadens criticism, and gives the urban public an entirely false impression of what is going on in farming.

It is, in effect, a subtle method of suborning the Press which, short-handed in war, had to take ' copy ' where it could find it, and of dragooning and lecturing the farmer in the public print.

It cannot be said that the National Farmers' Union has played a conspicuously useful or courageous part in this matter. The Union, for which I personally have a high regard, was handicapped and hamstrung from the start by the fact that far too many of its members were invited to serve on Committees. The result was divided loyalties. Such members could not discharge the arbitrary and often tyrannous powers and directions given them by the Ministry and, at the same time, stand up for the moral and legal rights of the farmers who were the victims of those powers. No man can serve two masters or ride two horses at once. He is bound to fall.

The result has been that the National Farmers' Union, in my view, has lost prestige and confidence not only among its members, but also among farmers who might otherwise have joined it. It cannot afford this. It has, in my opinion, bartered much of its birthright of independence and its hitherto unassailable record for fair bargaining in return for a fleeting war-time taste of bureaucratic power and subservience to the infallible Mr Hudson.

Now, as though it were unable to see the red light, the Policy Committee of the Union has actually formulated plans for the post-war continuance of the Committees in a modified form which the Socialist Government has jumped at. I wonder how many farmers realize that the Committee system, with its intimate check on their affairs, *is the ideal structure on which to nationalize the land.* That is the declared Socialist intention. Lord Addison, their former Minister of Agriculture, whose claim to farming knowledge is apparently based on the fact that he has been a professor of anatomy most of his life, says so on page 239 of that Socialist bible of policy, " Problems of a Socialist Government ": " *On the appointed day the title of all agricutural land will pass to the State.*" Short-term annuities, or State bonds, probably bankrupt, are to be the payment. Let the 42 per cent. of farmers who own their land bear that in mind. It is intended.

Apparently the N.F.U. does not realize the dislike and downright hostility which the system has created, nor does it appreciate the fundamental human fact that the coming of peace for most people means the dawn of that freedom for which we have fought and the shaking-off of war-time fetters. That is a mistake most profound.

Lest I may seem too fervid a hot-gospeller against the continuance of the Committee system, I will quote *in extenso* the following letter written to the *Farmers' Weekly* of February 9, 1945, by Mr Roland Dudley, who, as most farmers know, is one of the largest and most practical farmers in the South of England, and was a pioneer of up-to-date methods of mechanization. Mr Dudley is neither theorist nor pamphleteer, nor political axe-grinder, but a practical man. Here is what he says:

SIR,

The whole farming community will be filled with consternation when they realize the implications of the proposal of the N.F.U. Policy Committee to set up counterparts of the W.A.E.C.'s in peace-time.

It is suggested that the peace Committees should be shorn of some of the powers of the W.A.E.C.'s, but at the same time clothed with the control of what they are pleased to term 'good husbandry'—a term wide enough in the hands of unscrupulous persons to cover all the Gestapo-like actions of our present Committees whom we have only tolerated as a war-time measure, not to be continued a moment longer than the war lasts.

The proposed constitution of the Committees is also a cause for grave alarm. The chairman is to be appointed by the Minister. He may be a politician with an axe to grind. He will probably have no knowledge of farming at all. He may be a spokesman of some fantastic Whitehall notions of farming. He is certain to be a 'yes-man.'

At best he may be some one who has made a failure of farming his own land. His interference with our post-war farming promises to be intolerable, as local farmers will not be able to get rid of him.

It is proposed that there should be a majority of farmers on the new Committee, and theoretically—but only theoretically—they would be the guardians of the rights of the ordinary farmer.

If they were any good as farmers they would be far too busy with their post-war farming to do more than make perfunctory attendances at Committee meetings, with the result that all real power would devolve upon officials who could not possibly be expected to know as much about a farm as the farmer himself.

As for the technical side of the help to be obtained from these Committees, surely this must be the burden of the N.F.U. itself? Other industries do not expect the State to spoon-feed them, once they have

been given the opportunity of remunerative business. After all, nearly every advance in farming has come from individual farmers themselves, from Coke of Norfolk and Robert Bakewell onward. Committees are never conspicuous for any progress. They take no risk, and without risk there is never much success.

Consider, for example, the vast progress that might have been made, but has not been made, in the very important development of green crop drying. This is entirely due to the apathy or ignorance of the W.A.E.C.'s.

If the new Committees frown on this or on any other development, as they are almost bound to do if they have a layman for a chairman, the outlook for progress is very poor indeed. What hope will there be of keeping in touch with developments and inventions abroad?

In conclusion, for a sound post-war policy only two things are necessary: a just and fair price, and a market. If these are attained—and it must be realized that marketing schemes are involved—then any farmer not farming well will go bankrupt, and if a fair and just price is not conceded then all the Committees in the world will not add one penny to the farmer's income, and the land must go derelict again.

It was not bad husbandry that caused the decay of the land in the between-war period. Totally unremunerative prices were the cause. There is no escape from this hard fact.

We shall have a very difficult task to restore to our land the fertility taken from it by the W.A.E.C.'s under the stress of necessity, but we must not be hampered by any new bodies—however delightful they may appear on paper.

Imagine the sense of frustration of our sons when they come back only to find that the freedom they have been fighting for has been handed on a plate by the N.F.U. to a mass of officials.

LINKENHOLT MANOR ROLAND DUDLEY
ANDOVER, HANTS.

All this has now come to pass. On top of the Committees the Government has set up a so-called Central Advisory Council of fifteen hundred professors, scientists, officials, and other pundits to "advise" on scientific and technical developments. Their salaries are up to £1400 per annum, and within a week or so of being constituted they asked for more!

There is the whole matter in a nutshell. If we allow the continuance of this tyrannous and expensive Committee system we shall lay the foundations for nationalization of the land. That will drive our best farming brains to the Dominions, enslave the rural population to Whitehall, and betray every principle of liberty for which Magna Carta was drawn up and two German wars were fought.

XVII. THE FARMERS' MILLSTONE

Why Taxes on Land and Farming should be revised—Killing the Fertility of the Soil and the Replacement of Capital—' Squander-bugs ' of Agriculture—Iniquitous Death Duties—How E.P.T. hits the Progressive Man

> I come into contact with few who are not gentlemen or very substantial farmers: but I know the state of the whole: and I know that, even with present prices, and with honest labourers fed worse than felons,[1] it is rub-and-go with nineteen-twentieths of the farmers, and of this fact I beseech the Ministers to be well aware.
>
> WILLIAM COBBETT, *Rural Rides*

HEAVY TAXATION IS KILLING THE SOIL OF ENGLAND. IT IS milking it of fertility, squandering its stored-up values, depreciating the value of its buildings and machinery, stifling the initiative of farmers, encouraging bureaucratic control, and mortgaging its future. In other words, it is killing the agricultural goose which lays the golden eggs of food and employment. That is a heavy indictment. Present facts justify it.

Let me premise. On these two agricultural tours of mine during the years 1942 to 1945 I have been deviously and of set plan for some ten thousand miles through Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, Rutland, and parts of Northampton and Leicestershire. I have also been extensively through Hampshire. That is a fairly big slice of agricultural England. It embraces some of the most productive areas, and certainly some of the most responsible and far-sighted farmers.

Everywhere I found a determination to produce the utmost from the soil and unflinching loyalty to the cause of victory, but, as I have said, growing exasperation with the misused powers of some of the War Agricultural Committees. And lurking, but not always emphasized, was a paramount dissatisfaction with the present heavy load of taxation.

That grumble against taxation is not a personal one. It is a grumble on behalf of *the land*—the land as a national asset—and not a grumble by the farmer as an individual. Let me make that clear.

The farmer and landowner, who are jointly trustees of the

[1] For ' felons ' read ' German prisoners of war,' who receive thrice the meat ration and nearly twice the other rations of the British farm-worker.

nation's land, and the farm-worker, the wise man of the centuries all realize that the present scale of taxation on land is killing farming In plain words, the land has been milked dry to feed the nation a war, and little has been fed back to keep it alive after the war.

How many people realize that the best and biggest farmers i England to-day (1946) are limited to an income of £1500 a yea from which, with certain small allowances, income tax has to be deducted. That means that the farmer is left with about fifteer pounds a week on which to live, feed and educate his children, buy new machinery, build a new barn, and provide for the loss of fertility and values caused by war and taxed away by war.

This applies to any farmer, who is not a limited company. whether he farms a hundred acres or ten thousand acres. It is a paralysing thought.

It means that the 'squander-bug'—which, incidentally, should be adopted as a crest by many War Agricultural Committees—is eating at the very vitals of agriculture.

Let us look at it in this way. The needs of war, the overriding demand to grow food at any cost, have caused the ploughing up of thousands of acres of well-stocked, well-kept pastures, full of years of stored-up fertility. These lands have produced two, three, and even more high-yielding corn crops in succession. The profits on these crops are the result of many years of fertility. But to-day they are taxed away. That fertility cannot readily be replaced when the crops begin to fall off.

Secondly, we have seen the successive and intensive corn-cropping of land which for many years past has been kept in good heart by rotational cropping and by putting plenty of humus into the soil. That land to-day is being farmed to the limit, milked dry. Little of anything but fertilizers, the cocktails of farming, is put back into it, but its present profits are taxed away.

Thirdly, fertilizers are being used excessively. In most cases County War Agricultural Committees, many of whose officials had little or no practical experience of farming before the war, insist on the use of fertilizers without seeing that a complementary return of humus is made to the soil. The result is a bankruptcy of fertility in order to provide a quick crop and temporarily swollen profits which are immediately taxed away.

Now those broad generalizations will, I hope, give a picture of the main difficulties confronting the farmer to-day. Their futur implications are truly terrifying. Let us go a little further in

detail before we approach the actual figures on which these gloomy, but none the less veracious, statements are founded.

There is the question of repairs and maintenance. Before the war the farmer did many annual jobs as a matter of course. They included hedging, ditching, clearing drain outlets, repairs to roads, culverts, gateways, and buildings. Many were small jobs, but they took up a certain amount of labour and cost annual sums of money. They were necessary maintenance work.

To-day, with labour becoming scarcer and scarcer, such work is increasingly neglected, with the result that sums of money normally spent on them, and ranging, shall we say, from one hundred to three hundred or four hundred pounds a year, are annually booked as profits and paid away in taxes. Meanwhile, those jobs are mounting up. They will have to be done eventually. In the long run, when the bill comes in it will be a large one. That is the price of neglect; and the money which could, and should, pay it is now going in taxation.

I can sense that the average town reader will accuse me of special pleading on behalf of agriculture and will ask: "Why should agriculture be treated differently from any other industry?"

There are two answers, which, to be thoroughly Irish, are best put in the form of two questions:

(*a*) Is agriculture treated on the same basis as other industries?

(*b*) Why should it be treated differently from any other industry?

The answer to the first question is, No. Agriculture never has been treated in the same way as other industries. Although it is the prime asset of the nation, it does not receive the concessions which are granted to other industries for such things as wastage, deferred repairs, and capital increment for expansion. The basis for Excess Profits Taxation on farming also differs.

The answer to the second question is that the first asset of agriculture is the land. The appreciation or depreciation of land cannot be measured in exact pounds, shillings, and pence as can the assets of other industries. Land varies in every parish. It often varies field from field. Its yields vary with the weather and with the skill of the man who farms it. The capital sunk in it—in old, well-kept pastures, in stored-up humus, in good drainage, and in the results of rotational cropping—is often invisible to the careless eye.

Yet those invisible assets are being recklessly exploited to meet the needs of war. The farmer is allowed no real financial return from taxation to enable him to replace lost values.

It is true that he is allowed the use of artificial fertilizers and money to buy them. But artificial fertilizers in themselves are of no more real use to the soil than a dose of whisky to a sick man. They are merely stimulants. They add nothing tangible, nothing material to the soil. They do not contribute humus. Instead, their excessive use impoverishes the soil and will eventually cause soil erosion—the spread of the desert. *The only answer to counteract that is a bigger and better use of natural manures, both green leys and—that pure gold—stockyard manure.*

The farmer is also allowed certain money for the repair and care of machinery. He can do certain repairs to his house and buildings, in a very limited way. He is, on the other hand, allowed no money to buy new machinery, to build new buildings, to replace the loss of fertility due either to ploughing up rich old pasture land or to excessive corn-cropping on previously well-farmed land. He is given no allowance for deferred repairs and dilapidations. His increased valuations, most of them artificial, are taxed away.

Finally, he has to work on a low and frequently indeterminate pre-war profits basis for E.P.T.

The reason for this is that before the war the Government did not encourage farmers to keep accounts. Most of them were taxed on Schedule B, with the result that thousands of them are unable to prove any figures for the basic years for which they are now assessed for E.P.T. Thus they are condemned to £1500-a-year profits, before deducting income tax, whether, as I said before, they farm a hundred or ten thousand acres.

One result of this extraordinary state of affairs is that I know of a number of small farmers farming less than a hundred acres who are making handsome profits on which they do not pay tax. You could not induce those men to take on the extra ten or twenty acres which would bring them over the hundred-acre mark, because they would then be liable to heavy tax. Thus it will be seen that the big and progressive farmer is penalized while a small but cunning farmer can get away with a fat income and infinitesimal taxation. If he is one of the "Take it in one-pound notes, old boy, and no receipt needed" type he can do very well indeed.

Meanwhile the bigger farmer, the man with a long-standing stake in the land, with a sense of responsibility and a long-term policy for the future, is penalized to the hilt.

It should be remembered, finally, that farmers, as a whole, owing to no fault of their own, had a very thin time of it before the war.

They were wooed in the last war and let down in the last peace. The foreigner was allowed to swamp their markets. Thus, when this war began their implements, livestock, and labour-saving facilities were, in most cases, far below the level needed for the best results.

To-day lack of labour and heavy taxation prohibit any possibility of saving money out of pocket to enable those extra capital needs to be met. Are we going to allow this impending bankruptcy of the land ?

Let me give a concrete instance of a farmer, one of the most practical and progressive in all England, a man who is indeed a model to the world, yet whose brains, knowledge, energy, and initiative are alike stultified by this killing taxation—from which the all-wise Committee ' farmers ' are exempt.

Mr Billy Parker, of Heacham, Norfolk, of whom I have much more to say elsewhere, is the biggest farmer in the whole of England.

When I went to see him in 1942 in the course of my twelve-hundred-mile ride on horseback in search of good farming Mr Parker and his three sons were farming about forty thousand acres of English land. When I went to see Mr Parker two years later, in 1944, he told me that they had reduced the acreage to thirty-two thousand acres. I asked him why.

" Because the taxes are killing us," he said. " We should lose money on it and lose heavily. We will grow all the grub the country want—but how can we grow it if, in the long run, we might be driven bankrupt through doing it ? So I am drawing in my horns for a bit."

Now when one considers that, as I have said elsewhere, Mr Parker and his sons own and farm enormous tracts of land ranging from the light, sandy lands of Norfolk to the chalk heaths and rich fenlands of Lincolnshire and the deep bullock pastures of Leicestershire; when I add that they grow everything from wheat, rye, barley, and roots to flax, sheep, and pigs; and when I crown that tale of achievement with the news that they help to direct not only the greatest food dehydration plant in the country—it can turn out two thousand tons of dried carrots or potatoes a week, and possibly cabbages and many other green vegetables—it will be seen that they are super-farmers.

I need not go into the details of this enormous family venture, which includes the farming in three blocks of the whole of the

famous Blankney estate, which Mr Parker bought from Lord Londesborough. That property now runs, with recent additions, to some 14,700 acres. To-day it is one of the best-farmed properties in England.

Yet Mr Parker tells me that he is in debt on the farming of that one big property alone. That is because, when he took it over, much of it was in bad heart, and he poured thousands of pounds into it in improvements, new machinery, drainage, and the rest.

So, in order to get the precise mind of an accountant on this remarkable paradox whereby a man of skill, initiative, knowledge, and capital can be penalized by the State because he grows good crops and puts money into the land in order to feed people, I went to see one of the leading firms of agricultural accountants in England.

They, at my request, and with the consent of one of their clients, gave me figures of the concrete case of a very large farming estate which, starting business after July 1, 1936, has a standard for Excess Profits Tax based on a percentage of the capital employed. This is what those accountants said:

> For the first two years considerable losses were made, but from 1939 profits were made, possibly partly due to the war, but probably due to the close attention given.
>
> Taking one year's trading, we give the following in round figures:

Sales of produce	£200,000
Capital employed	160,000
Profits	£60,000
Taxation:	
Excess Profits Tax at 100 per cent.	£44,000
Income-tax at 10*s.* in the pound on the balance of £16,000 takes (subject to personal allowances)	8,000
Surtax, if this income goes to an individual and is his only income	4,518
	£56,518

This leaves a margin of £3482, out of which the proprietors have to live and recoup past losses and look forward to very considerable expenditure in replacing machinery and implements. (In this case the proprietors have other income, so that considerably more than the above amount would go in surtax.)

When we say that the value of the machinery and implements is round about £30,000 it will be seen that very considerable expendi-

ture will be incurred in due course for replacements, especially at present high costs.

It is true that there is provision for a repayment after the war of 20 per cent. of the Excess Profits Tax paid, but if this has to be brought into profits, as repayments of this tax at the present time have to be, and if it is all repaid in one year, and income tax and surtax has to be paid on such repayment, it does not appear to be of much value.

It will be seen from the above figures that with the present high rate of taxation farmers will be left with very little to face post-war conditions, with their land denuded of its fertility by the present intensive cropping.

Whether the Government has in mind some form of compensation for replacing fertility we do not know.

An extreme case can be imagined where income and surtax and War Damage Contribution would more than swallow up all the income. It would work out thus:

		£ s. d.	£ s. d.
Single-person income from non-agricultural property			100,000 0 0
Income-tax at 10s. in the £ (after personal allowance of £80)			49,960 0 0
Surtax:		£ s. d.	
2000	Nil		
300	2/–	50 0 0	
500	2/3	56 0 0	
1000	3/3	162 10 0	
1000	4/3	212 10 0	
1000	5/–	250 0 0	
2000	5/9	575 0 0	
2000	7/–	700 0 0	
5000	8/3	2,062 10 0	
5000	9/–	2,250 0 0	
80000	9/6	38,000 0 0	
			44,318 15 0
War Damage Contribution at 10 per cent.			10,000 0 0
			£104,278 15 0

Next I went to Cambridge, where I was given a summary of the accounts of a highly progressive farming company whose name and reputation are unimpeachable. Their capital is £300,000. Their profit for the year ended March 31, 1941, was £44,371, out of which they paid under Schedule A £1924, under Schedule B £4281,

and in E.P.T. £9807, giving a total of £17,012 and leaving a balance of £27,359. In that year, 1940–41, they were, as farmers, assessed under Schedule B.

Owing to the war they were brought under the usual profits tax—Schedule D for the year 1941–42—with the result that the accounts at March 1941 formed the basis of the 1941–42 assessment, with the result that the position on the 1942 accounts was as follows:

Profits to March 1942, before paying taxes . .		£43,840
Income tax Sch. A	£3,549	
Income tax, Sch. D (based on previous year)	13,363	
E.P.T.	18,098	
		35,010
Balance . .		£8,830

The profits for the year ending March 1943 were £40,579, out of which £23,875 was deducted, leaving a balance of £16,704. Thus, over the three complete years during the war, the company earned a total profit of £52,893, with an average annual sum of £17,631—a very poor result on a capital of £300,000. Yet this company is one of the best farming undertakings in England.

None the less, during those three years the company purchased two more farms and took over a valuation which kept it short of cash. The result was that at the end of March 1941 cash in hand was £1239; at the end of March 1942 the overdraft was £10,342, and at the end of March 1943 the overdraft was £24,522.

In a letter to me one of the directors said:

> With the present continual increase in labour and other expenses incurred in the production of foodstuffs it is quite obvious that during each succeeding year our costs of production are likely to increase, and consequently our bank overdraft will also increase, because it is quite impossible, with taxation at its present level, to put anything to reserve.

He added that, in the three financial years ending March 31, 1939, 1940, 1941, their total profit amounted only to £11,000, because, in spite of the big profit in 1941, they had losses in the two previous years. During those three years they had spent no less than £14,000 on new cottages and on improving old cottages, and but for the war they would have spent an equal amount during the next two or three years in order to get housing conditions on the estate into decent order. All that work has had to stop.

The director added: " *It is quite impossible to see where one is going to obtain the capital to carry out this work when the war is over unless something is done to ease the burden of taxation to allow capital to be put aside for this purpose.*"

That is the situation on a thousand and one other farms and estates throughout the country to-day, with the difference that this particular company had a pre-war standard of profits on their fen-land considerably above that in most other parts of the country, and that E.P.T. did not therefore cripple them to the same extent as it does most farms in the country.

What of the other side of the picture ?

We have considered farmers who farm well and keep accounts, who pay their taxes and ' carry the baby.' But there are many small farmers, men farming under a hundred acres of land, some of them dealers in pound-note transactions, who, because the tax net does not gather them in, do extremely well.

I heard of one small-holder who had cleared £350 profit from one acre of strawberries. That was not his only acre. I know several more of the same sort in my native county of Cambridgeshire.

In Norfolk I came across a man who was farming ninety-seven acres of land and doing extremely well. But when his landlord asked him to take over a ten-acre adjoining field he laughed and said, " No, thank you, sir. That would carry me over the hundred-acre mark and I should be paying six hundred a year in tax before I knew where I was. You can keep that ten acres for the time being."

One cannot altogether blame the small man if he manages to dodge crushing burdens. One can sympathize with the bigger man who has to carry them. His only incentive to do so is not profit but patriotism. Unless he has a very deep pocket, his land, like his banking account, is to-day being pumped dry.

So much, then, for our outline of the case for an immediate remission of the heavy burdens of taxation on the farmer in order that he may restore fertility and add improvements to the soil. The principal case I quoted was that of a highly organized series of individual farms, followed by an outline of the financial burdens of a farming limited company.

What of the individual farmer—the man who is neither a limited company nor backed by great capital ?

He sees his land suffering from lowered fertility amounting, in

some cases, to a definite threat of soil erosion. He knows that it needs more farmyard manure, which the early slaughter policy of the Ministry of Agriculture made it increasingly difficult to provide. He sees his roads and buildings suffering from deferred repairs and estate upkeep.

He finds himself, moreover, ordered about and sometimes bullied by War Agricultural Committees, who, let it never be forgotten, have the power to evict him not only from his land but from his freehold house with the resultant loss of his goodwill.

What does he ask for? Surely, without intruding his own personal complaints into the field of post-war international agreements, he is entitled to ask *on behalf of his land* of which he is the nation's trustee, that the Treasury should give him proper allowances for:

(1) Loss of fertility.
(2) Deferred repairs and estate upkeep.
(3) A sliding scale of profit per acre and/or per capital per acre involved for those on a £1500 basis.
(4) Increment of capital to cover his needs in increased mechanization, improved buildings, and installation of labour-saving facilities, and for the expansion of business, especially to farm the poorer and badly farmed lands.
(5) The managerial salary of the farmer before assessment for E.P.T. as in other industries, where directors are paid for their services before the return on capital is considered and after which the profit of the business is assessed for E.P.T.

These are common-sense demands. Upon their fulfilment depends the future productivity of the soil of England and the maintenance of the inherited skill and natural initiative of those who cultivate it. If we squander that fertility now and bankrupt that native skill we shall have dealt the final death-blow to agriculture, the handmaiden of the nation in war and its Cinderella in peace.

This question of the present physical and financial starvation of the land cannot possibly be met by any plea for post-war continuance of control or by nationalization, the suicide of enterprise.

The remedy is to see that the farmer is given substantial allowances *now* in order that he may repair the ravages which the land has suffered in its fight to feed this country. Those allowances are not, as I said, required by the farmer personally. They are required by him as steward and trustee of the soil of England so that that soil

may be kept in good heart, able to meet whatever demands the future may make.

In order to appreciate the future let us glance back to the past. History always repeats itself. During the last war farmers were subsidized to the hilt, cajoled and driven to the utmost, promised a new agricultural heaven when peace came. The price of land soared. In 1918 land was being sold in some parts for two and three times its pre-1914 value.

By 1922 the slump had set in. Cheap foreign food, grown under subsidies, was dumped in millions of tons; great landed estates were broken up to pay death duties, demanded frequently by the sacrifice of the lives of landowners and their sons who had died gallantly during the war. The farmer was forced to buy or get out. Very often he had to buy on a mortgage from a bank and pay 6 per cent. interest. He had to face the economic blizzard without the protecting umbrella of an ancestral and paternal landlord who, in the past, had regarded it as an article of faith that his tenants should be remitted all, or part, of their rents during a bad season and given every help to tide over the troughs of depression.

That was true of most of the good landed estates of England, whether they were owned by Sykes of Sledmere, Coke of Holkham, Lord Bathurst at Cirencester, Lord Yarborough at Brocklesby, the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth, the Duke of Portland at Welbeck, Christopher Turnor at Stoke Rochford, or by any other responsible peer or squire whose roots were historically deep in the land.

The bitter and class-conscious legislation of Lloyd George and other vote-catching demagogues did its best to tear up those ancestral roots and destroy that age-old structure of personal responsibility and goodwill. The State destroyed, but the State has not yet rebuilt.

Private enterprise, given a chance, can restore, rebuild, and revivify the land more efficiently, more cheaply, and with a greater sense of continuity than a regiment of committees and officials.

To-day the farmer in many cases is denied the protection of a good landlord. He is denied also the protection of a good State. No one would pretend that the officials of some War Agricultural Committees, with their squander-bug methods, are either a substitute for a good squire or a hope for the future.

The bureaucrat on the look-out for a permanent job and the Socialist who sees in nationalization a panacea for all ills point to the

much-publicized achievements of the War Agricultural Committees and plead for their retention in peace.

As for the recent five-year plan of the Socialists with guaranteed markets and guaranteed prices, that again is of little *permanent* use if taxation is to remain high. In any case, the foreign dumper is not dead.

Without good land, that intrinsic bank-balance, that trusted sheet-anchor, the ship of England may in the next quarter of a century drift on a lee-shore, unable to help or feed itself. We are not yet done with wars.

And now, as I write these last pages, Peace has dawned. The inquest is overdue on War Agricultural Committee costs and the other heedless extravagances of war. The farmer, if he be a philosopher, as most are, may well quote to himself those words of that admirable and most English poet, Dr Francis Brett Young:

> But there came days of peace that set
> A swingeing burden on their backs;
> Nine hundred million pounds of debt,
> And twenty million pounds of tax.
> Sucked from their blood to feed a crew
> Of war contractors, bankers, brewers,
> And holders of fat sinecures
> Who battened on the nation's purse
> Like maggots on a fly-struck ewe
>
>
>
> Since many a farmer soon became
> No more than a day labourer
> On land that once he called his own.

XVIII. WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF THE GREAT COUNTRY HOUSE?

The 'War Service' of the Great Homes of England—Badminton, Queen Mary's Retreat—Open-cast Coal-mining at Wentworth Woodhouse—The Fate of Clumber—Arundel Castle and Knole—Can Such Houses Ever be lived in Fully Again?—Some Suggestions to save our Heritage of Noble Houses—The 'Immorality' of the National Trust's Functions

HOUSES ARE LIKE HUMAN BEINGS. THEY REFLECT THE MANNERS, taste, and social development of the ages in which they are built and furnished. Thus, to-day, in an age of standardized semi-education and Hollywood values we may preen ourselves on having produced the ferro-concrete Mayfair flat block; the monstrous Odeons; the barrack-rows of Council cottages; the tinny tawdriness of black glass and chromium plate; and the bogus Tudoresque of the Stockbroker Period.

An age so unsure of its own values and so fearful of its future has little use for nobility of architecture, for spaciousness of thought, for grace of living, or for lovely decoration or furniture. We live in an era of pretentious mediocrity and troglodytic promise.

These enlivening thoughts are provoked in me when I gaze from my Essex bedroom windows on the empty desolation of a great porticoed mansion, standing forlorn in a thousand acres of wild park, full of old oaks and bracken valleys which hold the sun. Once they held antlered deer and crowing pheasants. Once the house, park, gardens, and home-farm employed two hundred and twenty men and women of our village. To-day the house employs five people and the park and gardens half-a-dozen. The owner, a peer, has sold out and gone. His father committed the supreme folly in these democratic days of dying for his country in the 1914–18 War. For that a grateful country charged his heir so heavy a toll of death duties that the estate, which had flourished under that family for six hundred years, was sold. The villagers are the losers. And they, typical of the ordinary men and women of England, are the losers every time a great country-house and its estate are sold and broken up.

This problem of the future of our great country-houses deserves the utmost care and attention. The desolation and destruction which has already overtaken so many great country houses now threatens many more. The last war, with its crushing burden of death duties, threw estate after estate on to the market and house after house into the greedy hands of the speculator and the house-breaker. Some houses suffered the soulless fate of becoming homes for inebriates or, as in the case of a lovely Adams house three miles from me, of becoming a remand home for boys of criminal mentality. Witley Court, Lord Dudley's great house in Worcestershire, was pulled down. Seaton Delaval, that immense Vanbrugh pile on the north-east coast, stands empty. Bolsover is a ruin. Clumber, the ancestral home of the Dukes of Newcastle, was pulled to the ground between the two world wars, and when the park and woods, four thousand acres of glorious country, were threatened with destruction, the miners of Nottinghamshire subscribed a large part of the sum which eventually saved it as an open space.

Montacute, the most glorious house in Somerset, is a soulless shell. True, the National Trust preserves and owns the ancient mansion of the Phelips family, but what is a house without a family living in it? It becomes a dry and arid architectural relic.

No, it is no use to persuade ourselves that merely to preserve the shell of a great house as a public promenade is a real answer to the serious loss to national standards of good taste and local standards of prosperity which occur when an ancestral mansion is sold up or about to be destroyed. Such great houses as Knowsley, Chatsworth, Wentworth Woodhouse, Bramshill, Compton Wynyates, Burghley, Hatfield, Welbeck, Badminton, Longleat, Knole, Arundel, Hurstmonceaux, Alnwick, and a hundred others are not only monuments of architecture and shrines of national history. Nor are they merely inhabited repositories of fine pictures and furniture. They and the families who dwell in them are part of the blood and bone of English history—a history which most of those families have done much to make, to mould, and to embellish.

This gimcrack age which worships at a totalitarian shrine in the mistaken name of democracy cannot lightly afford to tax such houses or such families out of their essential indivisibility. Once the great country house loses its function as a centre of beneficent local leadership and employment and as a nursery whose tradition has always been, with few exceptions, the Service of the State,

either in politics, the armed Services, diplomacy, or local affairs, it becomes an empty shell. The life and the meaning both go out of it. It loses what I may perhaps describe as its spiritual patina. More materialistically, it dries up as a fount of local employment and money. If it is not pulled down it becomes as soulless as a museum.

Let us consider for a moment the part which some of the great country houses have played in this war. I know of none which have not given greatly to the war effort, but I know of many which have been shockingly damaged by troops and of a few, such as Rougham Hall in Suffolk and Ham House at Richmond, which have been hit or wiped out by enemy action. Most have sheltered troops, hospitals, schools, refugees, evacuees, war stores, and even secret factories and laboratories. Many have suffered serious damage, and in very few cases can the present owners now afford to live in them fully or employ their pre-war staffs.

Badminton, the Duke of Beaufort's great Gloucestershire seat, was the evacuation home of Queen Mary. Alnwick, the Duke of Northumberland's huge grey Northumbrian castle, was, and still is, a girl's school. Chatsworth, the Duke of Devonshire's principal Derbyshire seat was also a school and was machine-gunned by a German airman who broke a few windows.

Wentworth Woodhouse, Earl Fitzwilliam's vast Whig mansion in Yorkshire, is commonly said to be the greatest inhabited private house in Britain, and I do not doubt that it is when one considers that the façade is no less than six hundred feet long, there are two hundred rooms and miles of passages. It is a magnificently imposing house, largely designed by Flitcroft, a protégé of Lord Burlington. Its courts and buildings cover more than three acres of ground. There were Wentworths of Wentworth, living in their great Saxon wooden hall or "Wood house" in the 13th century, and there they continued until the Wentworth heiress married Thomas Watson, 2nd Lord Rockingham. Another and subsequent heiress brought it to the Fitzwilliams in 1782 and it has been in Wentworth-Fitzwilliam hands ever since.

There is a story that in the old days they kept a sort of running footman on permanent duty in the entrance hall to guide people over the house, and another legend of an Earl Fitzwilliam says that he, wandering about in the cellars or kitchen regions one day, was ordered out by a servant who took him for a suspicious character since he had never seen his master in those remote parts before or,

possibly, had never seen him at all anywhere! Best of all I like the tale of the American guest who, when he left his bedroom to go down to dinner, took a little axe with him and carefully chipped a piece out of the panelling, doorways, and balusters on his way, thus blazing a trail that would show him the way back to bed.

What, the eager demagogue will ask, is the use anyway of so vast a house? Why should it be lived in by one man? Part of the answer is that the late Earl employed up to two thousand people in the house, gardens, park, woods, and estate building-yards. Many had been there all their lives. They were well paid, well housed, and happy. Many were given pensions. The house gave as good employment, and far more security, than many a factory.

The great park was, too, and still is, a centre of local recreation and a notable beauty spot in an area hideously disfigured by industrial development. Thousands of mill-workers and factory hands from Rotherham and other Yorkshire towns have found peace and beauty away from their sordid streets in the park, which is traversed from end to end by a public right of way, with numerous diversionary paths through the woods leading to surrounding villages. No National Park or State-planned 'lung' could offer lovelier scenery so near a manufacturing area.

In addition, the gardens and house were frequently opened to the public. Indeed, last year when the gardens were opened for the Red Cross no less than ten thousand people visited them and the gymkhana and sideshows which were also arranged.

What is the position at Wentworth to-day? Two-thirds of the house have been, and still are, occupied by the War Department, who seem likely to stay there for the next eighteen months or two years. No one, least of all the owner, complains of that.

In the remaining one-third are stored furniture, pictures, and works of art, leaving the present Earl and his wife two rooms each with three spare bedrooms and the Small Library for use as a dining-room. The Long Gallery and Large and Small Dining-rooms are used for storage of pictures and furniture. This state of affairs is likely to continue indefinitely. Any possibility of the present owner being able to maintain the house and grounds on the scale which previously gave so much local employment is out of the question.

Far worse, however, is the state of the park. Open-cast coal-mining has there been pursued ruthlessly, no doubt to help counter-balance the heavy drop in annual coal production which has been

so marked since State control took the place of private enterprise in the coal mines.[1] So the park at Wentworth had to suffer for the inefficiency of State control elsewhere, with the result that acres and acres were bull-dozed up, until the place now looks like a battlefield. The citizens of Rotherham and other towns and villages, who are the principal losers, protested vigorously, but to no avail. The vandalism goes on. Local residents are the worse off thereby.

"Many of the lawns and the Terrace have been ploughed up," says Lord Fitzwilliam in a letter to me.

> The Stud Farm and the Doric immediately below the Terrace wall have been devastated by open-cast coal-working. They now threaten to come into the Gardens right up to the corner of the West Wing and to come right through the Park removing most of the beautiful trees in Temple and Trowles Woods.

What possible benefit to posterity can be served by such witless destruction? It is useless to say that the needs of war made open-cast mining imperative when we are assured on the other hand that there is plenty of coal down the pits and that State control is the best and most "efficient" way to get it up. We have had State control of the mines since 1942, and coal output has gone down and down. Hence the makeshift expedient of open-cast mining in one of the few beauty spots left in the West Riding.

Over to the West in Lancashire, Knowsley, Lord Derby's great house near Liverpool, was occupied by both the Army and the Navy, who left Lord Derby about a third of the house for his own use. Although there are no rights of way across the park, Lord Derby has always issued about a thousand annual permits for local residents to walk in it and enjoy its beauties.

Arundel Castle, the Duke of Norfolk's historic seat, was occupied throughout the war by troops, including the 7th Guards Brigade, the 16/5th Lancers, the Royal Sussex Regiment, and Canadian Pioneers and American Forces. The keep was an Observer Corps post for three years, and many enemy raiders were spotted from it.

More than twenty-five thousand troops and members of the A.T.S. and W.A.A.F. danced in the lovely Baron's Hall, which the Duke threw open to them once a month throughout the war. The

[1] The output for the last quarter of 1945 under State control was 39,671,700 tons, or nearly twelve million tons *less* than the output for the last quarter of 1941 under private enterprise! This drop was in spite of the fact that under State Control in 1945 there were 8300 more workers and over 1000 more coal-cutting machines employed!

Duke and Duchess, when they could get home for a few days' rest from their war-work, lived in a small part of one wing.

In a letter to me the Duke says :

> A place like this should be shown on various days to the public. It always was before the war. It is my intention to do so again. But I must keep a staff to do so, and they will have to be allowed for against expenses and what money is over will go to charity. The place will go to ruin if no one lives in it. I believe the owners of these houses are the best people to look after them if they are allowed to do so.

There is the matter in a nutshell. No one can expect the owner of a great house to spend money on staff, lighting, heating, and the rest and throw it open to the public unless some of those essential costs of maintenance are allowed for in taxation.

Houses which I know personally include Crabbet Park, the Baroness Wentworth's place in Sussex, which was occupied by Canadians, leaving her a few rooms only ; Thorndon Park, formerly Lord Petre's place, which was a secret chemical store ; Ingatestone Hall, Lord Petre's present home, and one of the loveliest Elizabethan houses in England, which still shelters a school ; Woolverstone Park, the old Berners mansion in Suffolk which became a naval station; Culford, Lord Cadogan's former Suffolk house, which is now a school; Gosfield, the old Essex home of the Wentworths, a magnificent foursquare Tudor house, with, incongruously, a Georgian and a Regency façade, sits shuttered and empty above its great lake, the park littered with huts, concrete roads, and uprooted trees—its future, probably, a school or a lunatic asylum.

Woburn Abbey, the Duke of Bedford's great mansion, was largely a Wrennery ; and at Welbeck Abbey, the Duke of Portland moved right out into a comparative cottage.

Hurstmonceaux Castle, in Sussex, one of the most perfect medieval castles in Europe, which was carefully and expensively restored before the war, housed a building society ; and Hurstbourne Park, a former seat of the Earls of Portsmouth in Hampshire—now the property of Mr Patrick Donner, M.P.—was the war-time hide-out of the Bank of England.

Of Knole, almost the loveliest and certainly one of the largest houses in England, a house which looks like a village and stands in a park full of deer, the owner, Lord Sackville, writes to me :

> Before the war a large staff was kept, but owing to taxation this will never again be possible unless taxation went back to pre-war level.

Furthermore, the upkeep of a structure which stands on 3½ acres with a roof of 7 acres and which was built towards the end of 1400 requires constant repair by workmen, who require ever-increasing wages.

I have been engaged for over 6 years in negotiations with the National Trust for handing over, together with a large endowment fund, the structure, the rooms formerly shown to the public (lending the contents), and the gardens. The National Trust would then be responsible for their upkeep. They, in turn, would lease me and my heirs the remainder. My wife and I might then, with strict economy, and by spending my personal capital, be able to live in the corner we have occupied during the war. As to the Park, there have always been three or four rights-of-way, but for many years (50 or 60) the Park has always been open to the public. It is nearly 1000 acres in extent and it has been, and is still, extensively used by the people of Sevenoaks.

There, in another nutshell, is the problem of a landowner whose house, built by his ancestors, the Dukes of Dorset, is one of the loveliest and largest in the world. Yet it has been for many years open to the public. What possible benefit could the dissolution of such a house or its ownership by the State bring to anyone? Knole, which Miss V. Sackville-West so lyrically described in one of her books, is a house of history with, it has been estimated, nearly a million pounds worth of furniture and works of art contained behind its three hundred and sixty-five windows and within its seven courtyards. It is a house of kings and of history, of beauty and of antiquity.

That equally historic and lovely house, Hatfield, Lord Salisbury's home, was occupied as a hospital during the war, and its park, as I saw many times, was torn up by tanks and trucks.

Other houses which I have visited during the War have been Blankney, Lady Londesborough's home near Lincoln, most of which was a Radiolocation centre; Euston, where the Duke of Grafton had four hundred Barnardo boys from the East End; Brocket, where Lord Brocket gave up all his house to a maternity home; Kimbolton Castle, where Viscount Mandeville's home suffered thousands of pounds' worth of damage from troops and others; Helmingham Hall, Lord Tollemache's Suffolk home, the last moated house in England where they still pull up the drawbridge at night, sheltered many small boys; Sudbourne Hall in Suffolk was full of troops, while the owner, Sir Peter Greenwell, Bart., was a prisoner in Germany. Woodlands, near Iver, Sir Richard Fairey's house, was almost destroyed by a landmine, while his second home,

Bossington House, was full of Wrens, and his third house, a small Devon castle, was completely wiped out by a raider.

I could go on with a mere catalogue of a hundred other great houses. I will merely quote as the case of a certain marquess whose house is an architectural gem. It has been occupied by a school all through the war, and now, owing to taxation, his indoor staff, which was twenty-three is reduced to four—and is likely to remain so. How can he possibly maintain, and keep heated and lit, a house which for years has been the Mecca of American visitors and a lodestar of visiting architects?

Here are revealing figures for 1937 and 1938 from one great country house, typical of many. It was regularly open to visitors before the war.

Receipts

1937	House and gardens open on 38 days to 13,986 visitors	£819 15 6
	Gardens only, open on 5 days to 4609 visitors	219 19 6
1938	House and gardens open on 30 days to 11,526 visitors	663 13 0
	Gardens only, open on 5 days to 3522 visitors	173 4 0
		£1876 12 0

Payments

1937	Workmen's wages for preparing for and cleaning after admission season	153 16 3
1938	Workmen's wages for preparing for and cleaning after admission season	125 12 7
1937	Housemaids for extra cleaning	22 10 0
1938	Housemaids for extra cleaning	17 10 0
	Part upkeep of estate roads 1937 and 1938	20 0 0
	Special insurance (1937 and 1938)	5 0 0
1937	Donations to hospitals and charities	786 6 2
1938	Donations to hospitals and charities	691 15 2
		£1822 10 2

These figures speak for themselves. The owner makes a small surplus on one year, loses on the next, and is finally a trifle over £50 in pocket—all for the pleasure of allowing 33,643 people to walk all over his house and gardens on seventy-eight different days! Is it worth it? Under present-day taxation and inflated prices it is

definitely going to be an impossibility for the average landowner to continue these facilities.

What is the use of a Come-to-Britain movement if the burden of taxation is going to destroy half the beauties of Britain? The French Government, in spite of being Socialist, has for fifty years, *shared with the owners* the cost of upkeep of the larger chateaux. That is because the French, as supreme realists, know that their castles and great country houses, with their art collections and superb decorations and parks, are of immense value to their tourist industry. They bring millions of francs worth of business to the country.

Just as the castles of the Loire and the Gironde, the medieval towns of Germany, and the mountains of Switzerland drew vast numbers of tourists to those countries before the War, so can the great, historic houses of England. Their parks, lakes, and woodlands, and the vistas and gardens which the owners' forbears planned and planted centuries ago, would draw a vast money-spending public to Britain in the future. Such houses and the families who own them are part of English blood and history. Let us not destroy that which the centuries have built and embellished.

To pass over a house to the National Trust is begging the question. Once a house becomes a National Trust exhibit it is an exhibit and nothing more, a sort of architectural common over which gabbling and incurious geese may wander, hissing their unseeing ineptitudes. Such casual visitors who wander in because a place is open to view are often as unlike the true architectual student or antiquarian as the Sunday gaper at the Zoo is unlike the true naturalist who has perhaps bicycled or walked twenty miles to see a bird or watch a nest.

It is my own opinion—and no doubt a very unpopular one—that the National Trust is becoming far too big a landowner and householder. Admirable though its principles and excellent its stewardship, it is yet undeniable that its very existence and function are largely immoral, since a system of taxation and death duties which makes it impossible for the taxpayer to live in his own house and leave it to his descendants, without being driven to the shoddy subterfuge of relinquishing his ownership to, and remaining in his own house as a tenant of, a disembodied landlord such as a Trust, which avoids some taxes and all death duties because it is 'immortal' and never dies—this system is palpably immoral. Moreover, it is very stupid. It merely means that in order to avoid the sale of

beauty-spots and the demolition of lovely old houses, because of death duties, the public is invited to *give* money to the Trust while the Government at the same time forgoes its claim to death duties on the Trust's properties. Could any more fantastic and contorted method of robbing Peter to pay Paul be devised? It is one of the bitterest paradoxes of the crazy finance of our age.

To argue that because a property passes to the Trust the public thereby gains any further benefits in the way of added access to either beauty-spots or old houses is, in most cases, nonsense. The natural beauties of the countryside have been most zealously guarded—and added to—by landowners in the past, footpaths and rights of way abound all over England, and admission to notable houses has, in nearly all cases, been a matter of either a fixed public view day each week or ready acquiescence to a request to see over the place. But this the eager demagogue too easily forgets.

What is the economic answer to this problem? Surely it lies in three things: abolition of death duties on land, which the National Farmers' Union has at last agreed to urge (although the present Socialist Government has ignored their recommendation in framing its new agricultural policy); derating; and an allowance against taxation for upkeep, heating, light, and maintenance to those owners who allow the public access to their houses and parks on certain view-days.

Death duties on land provide an infinitesimal proportion of the national revenue, but they do an infinity of harm to rural—and national—economy, since they force land on to the market, often at uneconomic prices; throw the door wide open to the land shark and 'speculator'; destroy the farmers' and cottagers' security of tenure; often oblige farmers to purchase their holding at high prices on mortgage, or get out, and then throw the burden of estate upkeep on the farmer as the new owner, instead of those burdens being borne by the landowner. Equally, death duties contributed largely to that dereliction of the British farmlands to whose seriousness the War alone awoke us—at a cost of tens of millions squandered, often recklessly, by War Agricultural Committees.

Finally, even if an heir manages to pay the duties and hang on to his estate, the drain on his purse effectually prevents him spending any money on new buildings for farms, cottages, and other improvements. Then he is blamed for being an "inefficient" landlord!

Death duties on land could certainly be charged *on the sale of an estate*, just as they are charged on the sale of works of art, but to

milk a landed property of one-third of its value every time an owner dies is sheer agricultural and economic folly at the least, and, at the worst, a form of malicious legislative discrimination against a very useful and honourable section of the community.

England cannot afford to lose her stately homes. The remedy is simple. The loss would be irreparable.

XIX. COUNTRY ELECTION

The Battle of Newark—War of Votes in the Dukeries—A Foxhunting Candidate—The Tory Way—Miners and Farmers—Sergeant Wilde and the Duke of Newcastle—Some Old Election Battles

> "Nothing has been omitted, I hope?" said the Honourable Samuel Slumkey.
>
> "Nothing has been left undone, my dear sir—nothing whatever. There are twenty washed men at the street door for you to shake hands with; and six children in arms that you're to pat on the head, and inquire the age of; be particular about the children, my dear sir—it has always a great effect, that sort of thing."
>
> "I'll take care," said the Honourable Samuel Slumkey.
>
> CHARLES DICKENS, *The Pickwick Papers*

IF YOU GO SOUTH FROM THE LOYAL TOWN OF NEWARK-ON-TRENT along that arrow-straight and ancient road, the Fosse Way, you come after about five miles to a road on the left whose finger-post says "To Elston," and just past that on the right a little way you will see, sitting pretty on a gentle rise in a little park full of oaks and dairy cattle, a square, red-brick Georgian-looking house with generous windows and a white door. A walled garden flanks it, and great red-brick barns and stables stand massed behind it; and altogether it has a solid sort of yeoman-cum-squire appearance which argues good mahogany and old silver and roast beef from park cattle and port which was laid down when the boy was born.

In that house, which is called Syerston Hall, lives a friend, George Fillingham. Now, George is a cavalry, foxhunting-looking sort of a man with that long, lazy lope which says that he might pop his leg across a horse at any moment. He has the look of the Englishman who cannot stand London for longer than it takes to see a tailor and drink a bottle of port in his club. After that the foxes call and cattle beckon, so he will tell you, and there is much work to be done on the top fields. The sort of Englishman, you may be sure, who takes a look at France once in a lifetime but decides there are too many damned foreigners about, and anyway it's not half so exciting as the Balkans were in the last war but one. So home he comes to the foxes and cattle, the rooks at eve, and the glint of port by a winter fire.

Now, George has a very pretty wife and a son at Eton who looks

far too grown up to belong to any such youthful parents, and he lives in this house which the first Fillingham to come into those parts built when they were busy enclosing all the wide heaths and moors and bleak wastes which lay, dun and crow-ridden, along this ridge of high ground which rides above the broad Trent from Newark to Nottingham.

But let us forget George for a moment and turn up that road which says "To Elston." A half-mile ahead in a belt of tall park trees, full of pigeons, you go in at a white gate and crunch over gravel round a great oval lawn under the hangman branches of a mighty oak, and there, straight in front, is a long, low-gabled house of greystone. It has a look of Elizabeth and it might be Cromwell about it. Over the grey stone porch, high on the roof, is a stone drummer boy beating for ever on the dumb face of a stone drum. He leans forward as though cocking an ear for a footstep on the doorstep which shall wake the silent summons of the drum.

In that long, gabled hall, whose front looks across lawns to oaks and cattle-dappled pastures, whose back windows glow in the sun as they gaze over the blue Vale of Belvoir to the pale ghostliness of Belvoir Castle on its bold hill-top, dwells another friend. He also is a devoted foxhunter. Like those who carved their acres out of the barren heaths, he is of old Nottinghamshire stock, nurtured in land. He has carved his fortune out of the hard rock of commerce, but, as all good countrymen should, he has kept his feet on the land and a village moon above his head at night.

Now, this other friend, who dwells in that grey and rose hall of Elston, is Lieutenant-Colonel Shephard, a quiet and steady man with a humorous eye to whom work is a lodestar, sport is a mission, and difficulties are the pepper and salt of life. He has a charming wife whose heart is as generous as her smile.

When he came out of the 1914–18 war Martin Shephard had a wound, a decoration, and about a thousand pounds to call his own. So he decided to live in a nice old manor house in his native Nottinghamshire, to become a Master of Foxhounds, to serve his county well, and to serve his country as well, if not better, in the equally noisy warfare of Parliament. I am not sure, of course, that all this ran through his mind in quite such ordered and determined fashion, but, knowing the man, we may be sure that the germs of some such ideas were there.

To-day he is an ex-Master of the South Notts hounds, an ex-High Sheriff of his county, and Member of Parliament for the loyal and

ancient borough of Newark, the city which holds the keys to the North and gave Gladstone his first chance. The fact that he has also created a woollen business which is the first of its kind in the world and employs in normal times about fifteen hundred satisfied Nottinghamshire folk is the sort of thing he would do in any case, being a practical man.

What I like about him best of all is that when he had a leg in plaster to the knee he climbed a Scots mountain 2000 feet on two sticks, stalked his stag, shot him, and hobbled down again. That was after the doctors had said, "Take a rest."

So do you wonder that when news of the first general election for ten years struck a war-bedraggled Britain with something of an anticlimactic shock I took an oath to be in at the battle of Newark.

For Newark is the sort of English town and Nottinghamshire is the sort of English county in which to get the full savour and smell the true battle smoke of an English election. In that broad county of dukes and coal-mines, of foxhunting and factories, of partridges and Robin Hood, you find all the strata which make the richness of English character and national wealth. Above all you find men who, having made their fortunes in Nottinghamshire, still dwell in their native county. There are few or no London parvenus in that sometimes bleak and often noble county. But it has stone manor houses and rose-red villages, huge barns most splendidly built, vast woodlands and wide vales, sandy heathlands and ancient parks, a county where mighty oaks, which saw Robin Hood and his men in green, stand within a bow-shot of coal-mines.

Through it all the Trent, broad and silver, once a river of salmon and sturgeon, winds its way in a most dignified, unhurried, English manner. You could not mistake it for aught but an English river were you to come on it suddenly in a dream not knowing whence you came or where you stood. It has none of the shallow Celtic haste of a Welsh river nor the impetuous clatter of a Highland torrent. It is big and broad and looks like salmon, but its passage is deep and it goes by way of villages whose church towers rise in crocketted splendour and through broad meads where Lincoln reds and Shorthorns move in the immemorial dignity of æons of Smithfield honours.

So do you wonder that I took train to Newark and arrived one night at Elston when the owls were hooting and the stone drummer-boy looked as though he was going to take a leap on the moon and beat an electoral battle-cry?

It began quietly, too quietly, that election battle which was to sweep the heir of the Churchills from his omnipotence, to cast the Tories into the outer darkness of Opposition, and to bring in on the crest of a tidal wave all the spume and froth of Socialist agitations and class warfare and all the dangers of doctrinaire experimentation with the proven pillars of this country's greatness.

It began timidly, almost apologetically, that skirmishing before the final clash which was to cast out the power of a Government which had won the greatest war in history under the modern Marlborough, and was to usher in the Era of the Half-baked.

It was very English, this half-apology for bothering the country with so tiresome a thing as an election only a week or two after the last rockets had ceased blowing off our roofs in Essex and blowing up women and children in London.

True, Mr Churchill made a resounding wireless speech in which he warned tigerishly of the Gestapo which Socialism would, in its own due time, set upon the country's neck like a yoke.

But we started apologetically in the true Conservative way. There were plenty who were pained to the depths of their middle-class souls by his forthright denunciation of that political Gestapo which the Socialist crew had been promising an unheeding Britain for so many of their years in the wilderness.

"We've got an Air Vice-Marshal up against us, Jim," said Martin as we sat in that handsome dining-room at dinner that night. "A decent sort of chap. Very nice wife. He's taking it seriously, too."

"Bloke named de Crespigny. They live in your parts, don't they? Least, old Claude did. Met him steeplechasing once. Real old tiger. Sort of King of Essex, wasn't he?" said George Fillingham. "Nice glass of port this, Martin. Well, here's doubling your majority this time—a good scrap, and we'll keep it clean."

That was the Tory way. They were saying that sort of thing in a hundred Tory dining-rooms and clubs all over England that night, saying it with a calm confidence that Churchill's personal prestige alone was bound to win, that the country could not be so ungrateful as to throw out the man and the Government which had led them from the bitter brink of disaster to overwhelming and mighty triumph. There was, too, the feeling that, deep down, the average Englishman was too sound in sense, too conservative by nature, to fall for the dull and dreary doctrines of the Crippses and the Daltons, those political mummies, or for the heady, soapbox mouthings of the

Aneurin Bevans and the Michael Foots, those old-young men with the grey faces and the gibing tongues. No, there was a calm confidence that England would recognize that this supreme moment of rebirth from war to peace was no time for crazy schemes or bankrupt follies. I sat back at that graceful Sheraton table and heard Martin's words: " These Labour people are always working. Give 'em credit for that. They plug their case ceaselessly. Pity we don't do more of it. But then, of course, we couldn't while the war was on. But they don't like Winston's warning of their political and economic Gestapo-to-come. That got them on the raw because its true."

I thought of the many, too many, Conservatives who had buried their heads in the sands of smug complacency for too many years and then, with shocked middle-class propriety, disowned the old tiger's warning of that Gestapo: " Very bad taste, don't you know ? He shouldn't come down off his pedestal to such guttersnipe electioneering! " Shouldn't he ? We should see.

I thought, too, of Churchill's warnings of this late war, long before it happened. Those warnings which I had so often heard him growl over the supper-table. I recalled the smug young Conservative barristers and busy little M.P.'s who had sat back in my own club, night after night while the old tiger champed his cutlets, growled his warnings, swallowed his black velvet. Then when he had gone—oh! long after he had gone!—they had said, " Winston's a reactionary. Still living in the Boer War. Thinks he's a second Marlborough. Of course Hitler can't *afford* a war. He's bluffing. So can we! "

Well, now they were hot with polite embarrassment at that phrase of the political Gestapo. " Mud-slinging, you know. Most undignified. He really can't come down from being Prime Minister to chucking election bricks about."

I pictured them sitting smugly in that St James's club, in a hundred provincial clubs and hotels, debating the awful onus of having a Cæsar for a leader who would insist on descending into the arena to bait a few mangy lions. Such timid, tiny men deserved oblivion. They were to get it.

I thought, too, of the warnings of my old friend Lady Houston in the mad 'thirties, of her financing of the Schneider Trophy race and the Mount Everest flight in order that Britain should keep and develop the finest aero-engines in the world at a time when that political hypochondriac, Ramsay MacDonald, had decided that the

cause of Socialism would best be served by throwing the cause of Britain to the empty winds.

And I wondered if those days were not about to return to us under new guises and in the voices of new cries—nationalization of industry, which meant the muzzle on enterprise; State prying into every man's daily work and bank balance; hordes of officials and a tidal wave of delegated laws and backstairs regulations; a wave of strikes by men out of hand and despising their own leaders; and, in the end, sudden death to post-war recovery and to our export trade. For those whom the gods will destroy they first make mad.

There had been plenty of Left Wing pamphleteers hiding behind Roman *noms-de-plume* to pour the poison of their propaganda into the adolescent minds of young factory workers and troops weary of discipline and war.

There was plenty of fruitful ground on which those dunghill weedseeds might flourish. The pansy-barristers and smooth Conservative politicians who pandered too often and too silkily to any man of money, however got, were not the Galahads to fight that insidious crop. I distrusted them as much as I loathed the Crippses and the Daltons who would press all men down into the dismal swamp of State control and deny every man his personal liberty until the stout oak of English character should die under the white ants of their cursed bureaucracy.

No, thought I, there are still the Churchills and the Hoggs, the sober men and the fighting men of the Tory Party, to keep that flag flying in a great faith of England and the ordinary Englishman.

"I give us seventy to a hundred majority. A hundred and twenty if we're lucky," said Martin suddenly. "What d'you say, George?"

"Can't say," said George. "Must get in, mustn't we? We can't let these chaps run the country. Make a muck of everything, won't they? Hey, Jim?"

"I agree with Martin," says I. "They've been active in propaganda all through the war. Soapbox stuff, *Guilty Men, Tory M.P.* All that yellow rubbish written anonymously. I discussed this very matter with George Lloyd [1] again and again in 1938, and we had a new paper all ready, money included, to counter it. Then along came Munich. Lloyd said he mustn't embarrass the Government by starting a political row. Imagine the Left propagandists having any such nice feelings. It was cut-and-thrust with them

[1] The late Lord Lloyd of Dolobran, former Secretary of State for the Colonies.

while other men were dying. Now Quintin Hogg's book, *The Left was Never Right*, is out too late to do any good."

On that gloomy note, of a cause caught napping because its leaders and its rank and file were too " gentlemanly " to get down into the road and fight it out in this hooligan war of propaganda, we retired to bed.

Next morning we went into Newark, a town which enchants and delights. It is grey and rose and full of narrow streets and old whitewashed houses peering from alleyways where geraniums grow in windows and its Market Square is dignified with the dignity of four centuries of differing but harmonious styles of architecture. The pigeons wheel about its soaring church steeples, and the Town Hall is most aristocratic, as befits an ancient town of ducal dignity. For was not Newark for centuries the pocket borough, the political pie of the Dukes of Newcastle, who ruled its fortunes and controlled its markets from that great house at Clumber which is now all cast down and vanished. And that I mourn. For I see no worse harm, and probably more good, in such a ducal pie, which could give the country a Gladstone, than in a Trades Union dictatorship which can thrust a hundred or more elderly and outworn officials and check-weight men into a House of Commons where they spend a supine retirement voting yea or nay as their Whips bid them.

This once-ducal town of Newark sits lording an arm of the lordly Trent beneath the greyly magnificent ruins of a castle which held out for the King to the bitter end in the cold bloodshed of the Civil War.

Standing thus at the fork of the Great North Road and the Fosse Way, and commanding river and vale, Newark earned the title of " the gateway of the North," and even to-day it bears still the impress of a town of consequence. There is a sense of greater consequence than one finds in a mere centre of commerce and trade and manufacturing.

Here one has the feeling that the North Road traffic is still urgent and that the yards of the Clinton Arms, the Saracen's Head, or any of those delicious, little, old inns which crouch in corners and alleys, might well shelter a courier of the King or of Pitt on his way to a noble house of influence in the Dukeries, or even maybe a spy of the Scots, daring thus far southward.

And in all these imaginings you would not be far short of the historic truth, for Newark has early roots in the Parliamentary history of England. Its bailiffs sent members to the great Council

held at Westminster on September 26, 1327, when money was required for the war with France. But Newark did not possess actual Parliamentary privileges till 1673, when it was incorporated with a free Borough and remained so, sending two Members to Parliament, until the Reform Bill of 1885 merged it into a Parliamentary Division of 109 parishes.

Those two first Members were Mr H. Savile and Sir Paul Neale. Savile was an ancestor of the Lords Savile of Rufford Abbey, that magnificent estate of 18,000 acres in the Dukeries, which was only broken up a few years ago, to no one's good and to every one's regret. To-day Rufford Abbey, a truly lovely old house, stands forlorn and empty in its great park, awaiting the day when it will become the soulless shell of some charitable organization. The life has gone out of it.

Looking down the lists of Newark Members from that first Parliament of 1673 to the present day, one notices a sure and steady continuity of old Nottinghamshire names—Saviles, Markhams, Willoughbys, Molyneux, Suttons, Manners-Suttons, Pelhams and Manners, Thorotons and Clintons.

Nottinghamshire is a shire of rooted families, full of strong traditions and vigorous characters, but probably the most vigorous member Newark ever had was the famous Sergeant Wilde, who after a terrific five-day battle with Mr Michael Thomas Sadler, a Tory, was beaten on March 1, 1829. Mr Sadler defined his political principles as being " strictly those of the Revolution of 1688."

At the end of the five days, during which both candidates staged tremendous horse-back processions through the town, and rival poets wrote squibs, the Mayor, Mr Fillingham, ancestor of George, declared Mr Sadler elected, " amid the cheers of his friends and the most tremendous hootings and screechings of the immense multitude with which the Town Hall was crowded almost to suffocation."

Mr Sadler was the protégée of the Duke of Newcastle, and Mr Tallents, the Duke's Agent in that 1829 election, was an ancestor of the present Town Clerk of Newark and of Sir Stephen Tallents, of the B.B.C.

The election was followed by the famous memorial presented to the Mayor, signed by 111 people, which alleged that the Duke had given notice to quit to 200 electors who had refused to vote for Mr Sadler. The Mayor refused to call a meeting, so the complainants held a large meeting on their own.

The next move was a petition to Parliament, presented by Mr P. B. Thompson. He alleged that the Duke held about 200 houses

in his own right, and influenced individuals holding as many more, and that he demanded " the entire confidence and grateful co-operation of anyone who wished to rent any part of the 960 acres of valuable land about Newark which the Duke held from the Crown as well as the chief rents, Market and Bridge tolls, and influence over certain charities." The debate which followed was lengthy and occupied many pages of *Hansard*. It was proved that most of the charges in the petition were wrong. Summing up, Mr Secretary Peel said it had been assumed that seven persons out of seventy had been deprived of their houses, but no one had proved the allegation that menaces had been applied. The demand for a select Committee was defeated by 133 votes.

The excitement of this had barely died down when the death of George the Fourth necessitated a new election. The irrepressible Sergeant Wilde again appeared at the head of a grand procession which started from Balderton, headed by Mr Hitchins " as the preserver of public tranquillity," mounted on a charger, richly caparisoned, wearing the sword of justice three parts sheathed, and carrying in his right hand an olive-branch, the emblem of peace. Sergeant Wilde, who, I suspect, must have had Irish blood and a Barnum and Bailey mentality, was mounted on horseback with two freeman on one side bearing the " Bible ' Crown ' and Constitution," with two other freemen on the other side bearing a large gilt key on a blue cushion. The Sergeant was preceded by a dove with an olive-branch borne before eighty of the prettiest girls of the town, each dressed in white, with caps decorated with blue ribbon. Each carried a basket of flowers.

Not to be outdone, the two other candidates, Messrs Willoughby and Sadler, were met on the Muskham road by hundreds of people on horseback, headed by the oldest elector, a band of music, pink flags, hundreds of voters on foot, crowds of girls, three hundred horsemen wearing pink favours, another band, and finally twenty carriages drawn by four horses each, with postillions in pink jackets. The procession was nearly a mile long, and drew up in front of the Clinton Arms.

Wilde was again at the bottom of the poll.

Charles Lamb was supposed to have taken a hand in this election on Wilde's behalf, and Mr E. V. Lucas was of the opinion that he wrote some of the squibs of the 1829 Election.

Sergeant Wilde was finally elected in 1831, but in the following year the Duke of Newcastle, determined to oust Wilde at any price,

invited young William Ewart Gladstone, then aged twenty-two, to stand for the borough on the Duke's recommendation. He did so as a Tory, and, as he said later, "I never worked harder or slept so little." Mr Gladstone admitted that his first Newark campaign was the most strenuous period of his whole life, not excepting the many important episodes of his later period as Prime Minister. He canvassed every one of the two thousand houses in the town personally, and as he was elected five times, that means that he visited ten thousand families in Newark. He said in his old age that, although he had not been in the town for years, he could still find his way about any of its by-streets.

And here I think it interesting to quote a letter from the Grand Old Man which he wrote to the late Prebendary Robertson, a near relation, who had written to Mr Gladstone to congratulate him on his fiftieth entrance into Parliament. Mr Robertson's father had helped Gladstone in his first fight at Newark.

Mr Gladstone wrote:

DOWNING STREET,
Dec. 13, 1882

MY DEAR COUSIN,

I thank you very much for your congratulations and your interesting letter. The kindness of your father to me at the time of my first Newark Election was extraordinary, but it was of a piece with all his conduct towards me through a long course of years. He must have been long past sixty at the time, and was, I think, a man of the most regular and uniform habits of life, but he at once conveyed himself into a full and noisy hotel, and all the racketing and tumult of a contest of those days, which was, I can assure you, very lively. We started on canvass at eight in the morning, and worked at it for about nine hours, with a great crowd, band and flags, and innumerable glasses of beer and wine all jumbled together; then a dinner of thirty or forty, with speeches and songs, until, say, ten o'clock; then we always played a rubber of whist, and about twelve or one I got to bed, but not to sleep, for never in my life did I undergo any excitement to be compared with it. My account of the day is faithful, except that I have omitted a public-house tour of speaking to the Red Clubs, with which I often had to top up after the dinner, and before the whist. Grave thoughts ought to attend this day. I will not attempt to express them, but I warmly reciprocate all your good wishes, and I remain affectionately yours.

In 1835 and again in 1840 the irrepressible Wilde, now Sir Thomas, and Solicitor-General, bobbed up again. He got in unopposed in 1831, but was opposed in 1840 by Mr Frederick Thesiger, later Lord Chelmsford, who also became Solicitor-General and

finally Lord Chancellor. This was known as the famous No. 9 Election, for Wilde won it only by nine votes. He rose from the lowest rank, passing through the different grades of attorney, barrister, sergeant, king's-sergeant, solicitor, and attorney-general, chief justice, and lord chancellor. He finally became Lord Truro and died in 1855.

Gladstone and Wilde were undoubtedly two of the most notable M.P.'s Newark has ever returned.

The influence of the Dukes of Newcastle and Rutland on the electors of the town was by no means without opposition, for in 1740 the famous Dr Barnard Wilson, D.D., Vicar of Newark, a rich man, opposed the recommendation by the two Dukes of Newcastle and Rutland of Lord William Manners and Mr Staunton Charlton, of Staunton, as candidates. The following letters which I take from the *History of Newark* tell the tale:

FROM R. TWELLS TO THE DUKE OF NEWCASTLE

NEWARK, *January* 31, 1740

Your Grace recently wrote to the Mayor and Alderman as a Body, Dr Wilson, Mr Foster, Mr Stowe, Dr Taylor, Mr Rastall, Mr Farrow, Mr R. Hoyes. The candidates are highly agreeable to your Grace's friends particularly to the Mayor and Aldermen as Doctor Wilson who would have inflamed the Borough is disappointed in his scheme and had vowed the destruction of them all, and surely will, as far as he is able by his greate Riches, execute his wrath against them, unless some way screened from his vengeance by your Grace and my Lord Duke of Rutland. I, for my parte, am determined to keepe them steady to your Grace's commands and they at all events will serve your Grace and his Grace of Rutland.

Then follow letters from Mr Charlton to the Duke of Newcastle stating that "the town is quiet and seems well pleased at the measures his Grace has taken." Next came rumours of opposition from Mr Cartwright and Dr Wilson. The Duke thereupon wrote to Dr Wilson on February 21, speaking highly of Mr Charlton and reminding the doctor of his "absolute promise to be for anybody that I should recommend."

Mr Charlton on April 27 (1741) reports that he and Lord William Manners "had walked over half the town and met with a good reception." He waited on Dr Wilson, who told him he had not yet decided how to act, but subsequently promised him his vote and interest and "talked much about a Deanery. Lord Middleton's appearing at Newark last week where he met the Cartwrights had

damped all noise." Mr Twells previously, on March 16, wrote that the doctor was trying to raise opposition, but the town was unanimously against him. Mr William Darwin had come to reside at Newark and was "warm against the Doctor." On April 25 Mr Twells writes that the Doctor had tried every gentleman in the neighbourhood, but without success, and the mob were much enraged against him for withdrawing himself after he had promised to stand. "On Thursday night they got about his house with a full intent to have done mischief, but were appeased on being told that on Monday or Tuesday he would appear, and had given orders for the spending of £1000." The end of the whole business is described in the following letter:

MR TWELLS TO THE DUKE OF NEWCASTLE

NEWARK, *May* 6, 1741

MY LORD,

In my last I acquainted your Grace that Dr Wilson had given up all contest and that we were perfectly easy, that I feared the mob would fall upon his house for deserting them and it seems the doctor had the same feares upon him and therefore in order to secure himselfe as well as he could, he first orders all stones and rubbish to be removed from his gates and then Mr Thomas Milnes, his steward, to cry up Mr Holden and to treate all persons in his Name tho' without his orders. Accordingly on Tuesday very early, they began to treate but still could not get Mr Holden to move. In this perplexity they remained till about an hour before the election when they thought of Mr Darwin and to him they apply and at last prevailed with him to come and demand a poll for Mr Holden yet could not get Mr Holden to appeare because he was under a promise to Lord William and Mr Charleton not to give them the least disturbance if there was occasion to vote for 'em. Upon this demand of a poll we demanded that, as Mr Holden was in Towne, he should sweare to his Qualification upon which he appeares and declares himself a candidate, voted for Lord William and Mr Charleton, and after he had polled 70 and Lord William and Mr Charlton about 170, gave it up to Lord William and Mr Charleton who were declared duly elected. . . . Thus was the mobb deverted from falling upon the Doctor and the Candidates had some small share of it.

I am, My Lord,

Your Grace's most obedient humble servant,

RI. TWELLS

Imagine a vicar attempting to sway or bribe an election to-day when the Co-operative Society has taken the place of politically minded dukes, and a dividend is as potent as a guinea.

XX. THE RESULT

Young Tom Bradley of Winthorpe—Rainfall and Downfall in the Market Square—"We're in!—We're out!"—A Lopping of Heads—Newark Alone stands Firm—Enter the Era of the Half-baked—What Next?

> Statecraft, also, that tender Shepherd of the Flocks, has been despoiled of his crook and bell, and wanders in unknown desolation while, beneath the banner of Politics, Reason sits howling over an intellectual chaos.
>
> JAMES STEPHEN, *The Crock of Gold*

AND SO, THINKING OF THE IRREPRESSIBLE DR WILSON AND THE ebullient Sergeant Wilde and the patriarchal Dukes and the Tory-turned-Liberal Gladstone, who wove their brilliant colours in the political tapestry of this very dignified and English town, I walked into the Market Square, and there, right away, ran into, first, Mr Jones and then Mr Councillor Parlby. Now, Mr Jones is small and grey-haired, with spectacles and a quizzical smile, which is merely his way of disguising his sadness. For Mr Jones is a man in perpetual mourning. He mourns the Liberal Party, that decent political old lady whom Lloyd George murdered. That, I fear, is the haunting tragedy of Mr Jones's life. Otherwise he is a happy man, and an erudite one, well versed in the history of his town, as, indeed, he should be, for does he not edit the *Herald*, the last pillar of local Liberal thought, a very cathedral of good Victorian sense and sensibility.

So, while we were exchanging the gossip of our craft in the sunshine with the Town Hall pigeons about our feet and fat women buying fish and bootlaces at market stalls, along comes Mr Councillor Parlby. He is a mighty man, for he not only owns and edits the *Advertiser*, that bludgeon of Tory truth and lighthouse of enlightened thought, but he is also an ex-Mayor of the town. Indeed, my most enduring and endearing memory or Mr Councillor Parlby is of being received by him in the full glory of robes and chain of office on nights of gaiety in that truly lovely Adams ballroom in the Town Hall [1]—a room with few peers and no betters in all London—and then of retiring to his sanctum of red leather and mahogany and

[1] Newark Town Hall was designed by Carr of York (1723–1807), a notable architect who began life as a working mason. He also designed Harewood House in 1760; Tabley Park in Cheshire, 1762; Basildon Park, Berkshire, 1776; and the County Court House at York and the "Crescent" at Buxton. He was twice Mayor of York, and died in 1807 at the age of eighty-four.

there drinking most mayoral port while the band played, the townsfolk danced, the stars shone down on the jumbled roofs and soaring spires and all the dead dukes and duchesses came alive and one almost fancied that the church bells rang for Mr Gladstone's triumph and the family coaches of the great bumped over the stones under the flaring torches for their mansions at Welbeck and Belvoir, Clumber and Thoresby, Kelham and Kirklington. For that Adam room and Mr Councillor Parlby would between them evoke such memories even if there was no mayoral port.

Mr Parlby is serious of mien with a somewhat donnish manner and a weighty air as befits an ex-mayor who goes some sixteen, or, it may be, eighteen stone.

"Shephard'll get in. He's done too much good service for Newark, and people don't forget it," said Mr Parlby weightily.

"Shephard'll get in," agreed Mr Jones. "He's a good man. And the Liberal Party's got no money," added he wistfully.

I lured Mr Parlby into the ducal portals of the Clinton Arms, that great inn which gazes squarely on the Market Place and does not forget that Gladstone dwelt in it, that Lord Byron wrote his first book in its rooms, and that, anyway, it was quite a respectable place before either of them, for it began life as The Cardinal's Hat as far back as 1494 and before that.

Within were gathered the political sagacity and the stout commercial common sense of Newark. There was Young Tom Bradley, of Winthorpe, who is a yeoman of the old sort, although barely in his thirties. He will still be Young Tom Bradley, of Winthorpe, when he is ninety. And two bank managers who, though they profess no politics, as is right in shrewd men of sound finance, yet nurture fierce flames of belief within their discreet bosoms. And Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Cherry Downes, who is a maltster and wise in the counsels of the brewers. There was, too, a dashing young man with a rare come-to-battle moustache and a gay carriage umbrella under his arm. He had just won five hundred pounds on a horse.

"Shephard'll get in," they said.

"And the Government?" queried I.

"Ah! now. I wonder. A hundred majority? Or two hundred? Labour *can't* win, anyway! Who wants a Labour Government! Not this town."

And that, I dare swear, was a conversation you could have quintuplicated a hundred times in a hundred Conservative Newarks

all over England. So we had a drink and agreed that Shephard was a rare good chap who had done a lot of quiet, hard work since Newark had sent him back to Parliament two years previously in a by-election which made its brief splash in war-time history.

" Councillor E. K. Walker says he's got a first-class organization, a first-class candidate, and they're going to win. I think we'll get twelve hundred majority if we're lucky," said Young Tom Bradley, of Winthorpe, decisively. Now, young Tom is a keen and incisive student of politics who keeps an inquisitive finger on the local political pulse.

" Twelve hundred my foot—five thousand. I'll lay you twenty to one," said Battle Whiskers.

" Three thousand *at least*," declared a weighty farmer. " Double Scotch, miss, and no water."

" Twelve hundred! You see." Young Tom Bradley was firm. " Councillor E. K. Walker hopes there'll be no fireworks," with a warning glance at me.

Councillor E. K. Walker is a highly respectable gentleman who should have been born a Liberal. He is the Labour Party's local Agent.

" Ah, well, we'll see, gentlemen," said Mr Lawrence blandly. He owns the hotel and an M.C.C. tie. " Nice to get back to cricket, though. But Shephard's a rare good man. He'll bowl 'em out."

And so, on that note of supreme local confidence, the election began. Gladstone's ghost smiled grimly.

I woke next morning to a view over lawns starred with daisies and small blue flowers where, said a small girl, " fairies dance with pink tums and blue ribbons on." Beyond, haywains passed along a sunken road like floating ships, and the eye ran on to a Munnings vista of old green pastures and billowing trees where cattle stood hock deep in dew while the early sun sucked up pale mists. Horses stood sleekly, bay and chestnut, white and skewbald, and in the far trees glimmered the tall grey church, full of dead Darwins.

Beyond, half hidden in a slap-dash way in barns and gardens, lay Elston village, red and old. The cottages in Elston stand all ways to the winding village road—some facing it, some sideways, coquettishly, some with backs turned defiantly. But all have gardens. Gardens and bees and fruit-trees and grazing geese and moon-eyed cattle. That is Elston, sitting in its gardens below its coolly demure hall. And beyond it a little way, alone in a green, old, tussocky field stands Elston Chapel, that tiny, forgotten house of God with its crooked windows and old box-pews, its iron hat

pegs driven in the walls and the bees nesting in its crumbling roof-beams. It gazes above its grazing geese to the stricken battle-grounds of Stoke Field with a brook, willow shaded. There four hundred and fifty-eight years ago on June 16, 1487, John de la Pole, Earl of Lincoln, was slain in the great battle against the Pretender, Lambert Simnel.

Perhaps this old chapel was built to succour the souls of those who died in that clash of the feudal nobles of England when great names of Norman times went down in the flame of civil war.

Be that as it may, Elston Chapel was for centuries a meadow chapel where humble cottagers hung up their wideawakes and beavers and knelt in smocks and fustian to worship in days when all rural England was a quiet place, a Morland scene. To-day the old chapel stands alone and empty, warm in the sun. A half-smile, as of an old and contented village wife, upon its ancient face, alone with the swallows and bees in its eaves, the geese grazing about its doors.

When I think of it I think too of that other forlorn relic of a nobler age, the great dovecote at Sibthorpe, a mile away across the flat fields. It stands, grey, rounded, and lonely, like a sturdy light-house in the fields, hard by the Devon brook, the shadows of its vanished fishponds and their sluices still plain to see in the grass about its walls. The eye can follow, too, the vanished walls of the abbey, the dead outlines of garden terraces—all gone and no brick left on another save in that great, gaunt dovecote with its twelve hundred holes for the birds which no monks eat and where only wild birds nest.

We went that day to Laxton, which is the last village in all England to keep the old Saxon custom of open-field farming. That is what you would expect on such a properly feudal estate as this of Earl Manvers. There, in a tiny village hall with Lady Sibell Argles, the earl's sister in the chair, was asked the best question of all the election.

The candidate had finished a plain, sincere speech on the three main problems of post-war—food, housing, and work. A speech of sober hopes and plain facts with none of the class-conscious promissory notes of Socialism. The audience, apple-faced men and women, with here and there a grey ancient, listened attentively, clapped decorously. You do not breed Pinks in villages of that sort. There were too many contented faces.

"What—no questions?" said Lady Sibell at the end. "No questions? Surely there must be. We can't let Colonel Shephard escape like that."

" Ay! Ah've got a question, Colonel," suddenly said a ruddy-faced farmer. " Ah't in favour of Bed-robbin' Act ? "

" What Act ? I didn't hear properly, I'm afraid," said Martin, mystified.

" Bed-robbin' Act—Daylight Savin' they calls it," explained the questioner with an enormous grin. " Ah calls it plain Bed-robbin'."

" No, certainly not," said Martin, smiling. " I put my name down to a motion against that Act. It's plain foolishness."

" Eh! Ah'm glad to hear it. An' if you catch yon chap at Westminster that started that Act jest send him down here, an' ah'll give him a job at hustlin' a hundred old hens up to roost a couple o' hours before their time each night. That'll teach him! "

Mr Johnson, who asked that question, said to me on the way out, " We Johnsons have been farmin' here for three hundred years, an' never needed a Bed-robbin' Act to get good harvests in! Take a look in churchyard as ye go by, an' ye'll see we've been hoppin' in there since sixteen hundred—without any Act to hasten us! "

They tell a tale in that idyllic village of an old man, bearded and philosophic, sitting in his garden at his front door. He was accosted by a Socialist canvasser with that peculiar condescension which the middle-class ' intellectuals ' of that party invariably display towards the villager.

The canvasser asked the old man for his vote. He also inquired what the patriarch demanded of the Government. The old man studied him with embarrassingly blue eyes for a wordless two minutes. Then he said:

" Ye want summat o' us! Ah wants nowt o' ye! Ah've not been to they house askin' ye for owt. Why coom to mey ?

" Look'ee, young man. Ah've worked all my life for a gentleman what *is* a gentleman an' a lord into t' bargain. Earl Manvers of Thoresby Park. He's treated mey well, an' Ah live in one o' his cottages wi' an easy mind, an' Ah'll dee easy an' be buried up yon wi' mey own folk. So Ah wants nowt o' thee, an' thee'll get nowt o' mey. Ah'm a happy man. Thee can't be or thee wouldn't be askin' mey for summat. Be off, young man! "

And the discomfited canvasser was heard to say later that " this cursed feudalism had the people in its grasp body and soul." I wondered if the old man would have been any happier in a directed and controlled Socialist state, living in a cottage owned by the Co-operative Society.

So much for the beneficient effects of a good landowner. The

same atmosphere of content and good-natured contempt of Socialist attempts to capitalize class warfare was plain to see on the Duke of Portland's estates, on the old Clumber property, and even in villages where the land and cottages had been sold away from the big estates years previously. The memory of a good system still persisted.

A very different state of affairs was evident at Keyworth. There a rowdy meeting ended in the candidate's car being defaced and insulting messages stuck all over it and placed on the seats.

I asked a local man why that particular village always produced noisy meetings and thoroughly offensive interruptions.

"It's an old stocking-making village," he explained. "Years ago—maybe a hundred years—they all made stockings here, and it was done by sweated labour. They lived hard lives and worked for hard masters. Their grandchildren have inherited all that bitterness. Your man's got plenty of support, but half his people won't come to his meetings. They daren't! They vote for him all the same."

There, in the microcosm of a small and rural village, was expressed the bitter aftermath of that Victorian factory drudgery which has left its legacy a thousandfold in large cities and been fanned assiduously by the economic writers and pamphleteers of the Left.

An even odder sidelight on the rural mind was provided at Cropwell Bishop. Here, in a village which lives largely by working in quarries, there is a strong tradition of old-fashioned Radicalism. They would not vote Conservative if Noah was Tory Premier and the Ark their sole salvation.

I addressed a meeting on the village green which was cheerfully defiant and obdurately critical. After an hour of heckling I adjourned to the local inn suffering from speaker's throat and was treated by our opponents. The inn closed, and, full of party fervour, we all returned to the village green and resumed strife while the owls called and village mothers scolded their offspring to bed.

Finally the most persistent questioner and leader of the opposition said magnanimously, "Eh! well, laad. Thee's stuck to they guns well, and Ah've enjoyed our argument, but, damn, Ah would na vote for they chap, the Tallyho man, ef he was only man int' warlld!"

"Of course you wouldn't," says I. "You're a Radical, and nothing would alter you."

"Eh! Damn that! But yon chap o' thine wad niver git ma vote. Why, he headed b—— fox while he was huntin' hounds here two years ago. Ah seen him! Damn that!"

And, behold, it was even so. Two years previously Martin, hunting hounds, had jumped into a hidden sunk lane and inadvertently headed his own fox—a crime for which a non-hunting but fiercely sporting Radical quarryman would never forgive him!

Another of the same sort, after an hour of question and attack at another village meeting, suddenly declared to a startled audience, "Eh! well! Colonel's no a bad chap. Ef he wasn't a damned Tory Ah'd vote for him meself. But Ah'm goin' to shake hands wi' him afore I go!" And, striding collarless to the platform, he gripped Martin's hand in a mighty grasp and, turning to the rabbit-mongrel at his heels, said, "Yon's ma little dog. She coomes to all the meetings wi' mey to see t' fun! Ah've trained her to bark at speaker when he gets over long-winded!"

Which bears out the philosophy of the man at Fiskerton who said to me, after he had asked the candidate three or four long and apparently hostile questions, "Ah'm votin' for t' Colonel, tha knows. Yon's a good chap!"

"But you heckled him a lot," I exclaimed.

"Eh! Ah did that. Ah allus doos. Ef tha lives in a village like this thee's nowt but beer an' dominoes for liveliness all t' year round, so we waits for an election for a reet bit o' fun!"

Such incidents, thoroughly English in their plain good nature and earthy fun, characterized the election. Martin addressed five and six meetings a day, in collieries and idyllic villages, in town halls and at the cross-roads of hamlets which had not changed much since the Wars of the Roses. One remembers such meetings and the men who made them with abiding pleasure.

There was Car Colston Common, dappled with geese and cattle and an outdoor meeting convened by that grand old Englishman, Mr Thomas Blagg. Mr Blagg belongs to an old yeoman family. He dwells in the remains of an ancient village manor with the Cromwellian sabres used by his forbears hung on his walls, and chairs to sit on and tables to eat at which are as old and as English. He is bearded and erect, a fount of history and county lore, a lover of old ways and old traditions.

There are plenty such in those Nottinghamshire villages, dwelling in large farmhouses and village manors with stone-paved halls and broad oaken stairs, with great, flagged kitchens and dining-rooms

full of old oak and polished pewter. A sturdy race living sturdily amid the fine furniture of a past that knew none of the shoddy gimcrackery which a bemused modern world accepts as part of its brave new scheme of things.

In those villages Danish names, Plungar and Langar, Gunthorpe and Balderton, ring the chimes of history with the Saxon and Norman French of Holme Pierrepont and the plain proprietorial names of Thoroton, Clifton, and Staunton, which tell of far-off squires whose descendants still hold land to this day.

One remembers with a particular emphasis those village meetings, each with its individual savour, schoolroom or village hall, each portraying in its decorations, its audience, even its scents, the life and environment of the people. Some, though but a few miles apart, were as different as though they had been in counties a hundred miles separated.

Orston, with its Union Jacks flanking a huge picture of Lord Kitchener in Boer War uniform, a packed meeting in a tiny wooden-floored old village hall set in the churchyard of an ancient and lovely church paternally overlooking the Hall, its stables and walled gardens. A meeting that began with clapping and ended with "God save the King," a meeting where the candidate spoke, as always, earnestly and sincerely, without declamation or flourish, without false promises or dazzling Utopias—an Englishman talking of mutual problems with Englishmen of the same soil, and ending by sitting on the table and discussing housing and pensions with women who crowded round, and then, at the end, "Well, Colonel, we hope we'll be seeing you hunting round here soon. *That*'ll be more like peace. We'll believe in it then!"

Another village, a mining one, with a bright, oppressively new hall, wide windows, shiny desks, modernity epitomized even unto the almost futuristic pictures of lambs and flowers on the walls of the childrens' classroom. A room packed with earnest miners, men earning from ten to twenty pounds a week, who could pay forty pounds for a greyhound, who lived in good, well-built cottages, each with its garden, in a village where slumdom was unknown, where the cinema and the inn, the library and the lecture-room, brought all the vaunted benefits of modern life to the miner and his wife.

Yet there was scarcely a happy face among the lot. They lacked neither money nor good clothes, neither good houses nor modern pleasures—indeed, the eight thousand men of the Bolsover Company had saved no less than £750,000 in War Savings and many a man had

£1000 or more to his credit in the bank while the pit itself had the distinction of the highest output per man shift in the kingdom.

Yet, as I say, I could see few happy faces, not a tenth of the content that one would see written in the faces of a farming village audience. Why? Is it because life underground stunts a man's outlook and destroys his pleasure in simple things? Is it because I saw relatively few gardens cultivated with the same love and pride that one sees in a farming village? Or is it that for years and generations the miners' outlook and attitude to life has been sedulously soured by Left agitators, Communists and class-war opportunists from A. J. Cook and Lloyd George to the anonymous 'yellow belly' propagandists of to-day, until the miner honestly believes himself the most hardly done by of all men and the coal-owner his fatted and avaricious enemy?

When Martin asked them, in that straight, quiet way of his, whether a man in the room honestly believed that nationalization of the mines would raise another ton of coal per annum, add another shilling to their wages, or decrease costs of working by a pound a year, not a voice was raised to say yes.

I think perhaps half the answer to the problem was provided me by the door helper, an enormous giant six feet seven or more, and seventy years of age.

"How are the crops in your part, sir?" he asked.

"Good," said I. "Long in the straw and, if we get rain soon, the corn will be full in the ear. A good harvest, with luck."

"Ay! That's good—and fruits going to be goodish, pears specially, I'm thinking."

"Do you farm a smallholding, then?" I asked.

"Nay! Ah wish Ah did. Ah'm fifty year in the pit, but ma heart's in the land. You should see my allotment. That keeps me happy." That man, I think, had the answer.

I think of other people and houses—Hockerton Manor in its farmyard amid huge barns and orchard trees, with its three arrow-flights deep set in the wall by the entrance door and its charming young couple, Ashton Craven-Smith-Milnes, whose family owned that stately William and Mary house, Winkburn Park and its acres for four hundred years till they had to sell, and his wife, lovely and amusing, daughter of that fine old sporting Yorkshire character, Parson Topham of Beverley.

And then the man in a dogcart half-way between Kinoulton and Hickling who said: "You'll get good meetings in both our villages,

Colonel. The Quorn, the Belvoir, and the South Notts hunts all meet hereabouts, so we're Tories to a man and damn happy! Ha! Did you ever see a Socialist with a grin on his face? No—nor out with a pretty girl! A long-faced lot, sir, and no good to man nor dog!"

Saying which, he whipped up his horse, drove off at a spanking rate, waving his whip and holloaing an imaginary fox.

I think too of Colston Bassett, that tiny feudal village which clings to the skirts of its park where Sir Edward le Marchant is king, and of Owlthorpe in the summer dusk where there were surely enough owls to give it its name—owls sitting on telegraph poles; owls wisely listening in oaks; owls luminous on barn roofs and owls beating the dim stubbles with that huge particular owl, tawny yellow in the stockyard, of whom Mr Bates, that mighty, jolly farmer said, "He's my old chap," as though the owl was part of the farm and on the staff, as I do not doubt he was.

"Ay, we've a squire, Major Davies, a nice young gentleman," said Mr Bates. "He have about fourteen hundred acres, and it's a tidy good shoot. But he have no house. The Hall was pulled down about a hundred year ago, and they haven't built a new 'un yet. So he stays in the farmhouse with my wife and I and always comes to give us a hand with the harvest, when he can get leave."

I wondered if that simple devotion to the soil was in the Socialist chapbook.

And then, in the midst of this Corydonish election in which fox-hunting and farm prices and talk of the ex-Member, Lord Titchfield, were the main topics: "Ah! a nice 'un was his Lordship. Allus spent a week or two down the mines with the miners, loading coal"—who should descend upon the ancient peace of Newark but Professor Laski.

That urban-minded and garrulous little petrel of Socialist politics swooped upon Newark to the aid of the Air Vice-Marshal, who was pursuing a laborious and somewhat stilted way through the narrow seas of rural politics.

I determined to have a look at him. I did not know Professor Laski, but his writings had depressed me. He seemed to find so much solace in the revolutionary standards of less happy countries and so little comfort in the Britain which his ancestors had adopted as a place of profitable residence. And he wrote and talked so much about it all. Evidently a man with a disturbed mind.

Newark is called "the gateway to the North." They say that

common sense comes from the North. Professor Laski hit Newark from the South.

It was a Saturday night meeting in the Market Square. Several hundred spectators represented the typical elements of the constituency—agriculture, mining, brewing, malting, and engineering. They were all there.

Professor Laski appeared on a sort of French Revolution cart fitted with a microphone instead of a guillotine. Dressed in a tight-fitting, hip-slinky overcoat of the sort that dance-band leaders wear, he addressed the crowd with an air of quite remarkable superiority. For the better part of an hour he sprayed us with an oleaginous stream of rhetorical oratory, full of sly half-truths and old womanish digs at Mr Churchill; the British Empire, as apparently typified by the Conservative Party; Mr Brendan Bracken, who clearly was an ant in the Laski pants; and the British idea of freedom with which the little professor did not apparently agree. No doubt it was not in his blood.

Mr Laski was infinitely condescending. He even told the assembled citizens of Newark, most of whom, presumably, were supposed to be his supporters, that they would know a great deal more about their country if they read history books, but then, of course, they never did read history books.

One got the impression that Mr Laski regarded Newark as a sort of rural dead-end, a feudal sump, a place of beer and bacon but no brains. In fact, it was quite obvious that Newark was expected to regard itself as highly flattered by this opportunity to bask in the pinkly iridescent rays of the Laski sun.

I could not help feeling rather sorry for the Air Vice-Marshal. He seemed so completely out of the party. So, too, for that matter did the honest stalwarts of Newark Labour who somewhat bemusedly supported Mr Laski on the platform. This type of oratory was something very rich and rare, obviously from an intellect stratospherically above the plain, blunt, and fairly honest opinions held by the rank and file of Newark Labour.

I confess that after a time Professor Laski irritated me. His glib flow of jibes at Churchill and "that imp Beaverbrook." His cocksureness. His irritating air of condescension. His Manchester accent which married so ill with the affectation of Oxford donnishness.

I contrasted his political fireworks with the sober English common sense of local farmers and farm workers, with the clear-headed questions of local miners who, though they might not all vote

Conservative, were, at any rate, fair in their questions, concise in argument, and scrupulously accurate.

No, Mr Laski did not make a very good mirror to hold against these local standards in this English town which did not read its history books.

And here let me add a little confidential aside. When it came to the question of choosing a Labour Candidate for Newark three names were put forward. One was a local railwayman who would have represented a solid bloc of local Labour opinion. The third was the Air Vice-Marshal.

Now, as an outside observer, one would have thought that the man to fight the battle was the local railwayman. Not so the Newark Labour bosses. They were nothing if not genteel. Newark had been represented by lords and marquesses, so the Labour Party must obviously have the next best thing. An Air Vice-Marshal was getting pretty near the stars—a sort of Labour rocket fired into the rural firmament and expected to burst in a shower of glittering respectability above Newark Market Place.

The Air Vice-Marshal certainly looked the part on the platform. But there, alas, was Professor Laski, swaying slightly before the microphone, his hands in his pockets, his eyes glinting behind his large spectacles in a sort of dreamy mysticism, evidently lost in a Laski vision of Utopia, an ecstacy of involved phrases and cheap cracks at Mr Churchill, with, now and then, that sort of erudite aside into ancient political history in which the book-worm politicians of 'intellectual' Labour delight.

Mr Laski is a small man, what you might call narrow-chested. He is not an imposing figure. He does not look as though he had ever shouldered a pack or done a day's manual labour. But the Laski mind overshadowed the Laski physique, and even occasionally diverted one's eye from the Laski dance-band overcoat.

Mr Laski told the audience that they were very lucky to have the Air Vice-Marshal as a candidate. He was a prize trump pulled out of the bag, one of the top-line candidates in the Labour repertoire.

Shortly after the Air Vice-Marshal got up. He warned us that we should not get the truth from any paper but the *Daily Herald*. Also, very sinisterly, that the Tories would probably let out a new grimalkin from the bag, a second Zinoviev letter. Newark looked a little blank. It had clearly forgotten Zinoviev. "That was a forgery," said the Air Vice-Marshal, but "something like it was probably on the way," he warned, and sat down.

That apparently was the end of the meeting. The Chairman did not invite questions—odd, but true.

So, raising my voice, I asked Professor Laski why he had advocated "revolution by violence" in two speeches in 1941,[1] "while most Englishmen were either fighting or being bombed at home," and why he had said that the Labour Party "must not wait until after the War to reconstruct . . . their choice was very simple, to begin Social transformation by general consent now or do it by violence after the War."

And I added, "What does the bloodthirsty little Professor mean by violence?"

Mr Laski suddenly became very cross. He replied at great and involved length; Mr Churchill was dragged in for a kick in the pants on the way. He ended by saying: "When people feel it is the moment for great experiments, when they feel the time for innovation is possible, that is the time to experiment, the time to make innovations, because when the War is over people so easily forget, especially those who have the power in their hands." He pointed out that we had missed the boat so far as his idea of revolution was concerned at the end of the Napoleonic wars and again at the end of the 1914 war. He called it "doing something for the British people"—but whether the British people would like to have it done for them in the Laski way was not made clear.

I then asked, "You do not deny the rightness of general consent; yet when general consent goes against you, you substitute revolution?"

Little Mr Laski again replied to this question at great and involved length. He managed to drag in Irish Home Rule and the late Lord Milner in order to prove, in his own words, that it does not lie in the mouth of any member of the Tory Party to discuss the question of violence.

Then he used this beautifully hackneyed expression: "When a situation in any society becomes intolerable, and when 25 per cent. of the people have inadequate nutrition, it does become intolerable—it does not, obviously, become possible to prevent what is not given by generosity being taken by the organized will of the people."

He quoted the French Revolution and Edmund Burke at great length. I told him that I was not interested in any revolution but the Laski revolution, and that I did not think that the citizens of Newark would wish to join the Laski Light Infantry.

[1] At Bishop's Stortford on November 15, and at Bournemouth on December 13, of that year.

And, I added, " We expect serious constructive thought from the Chairman of the Labour Party, but since you have consistently attacked every one and everything from Mr. Churchill to the leaders of your own party and the Constitution of this country, and have been disowned by Mr Atlee only this morning, how can anyone take you seriously ? I suggest that you are not an asset to the Labour Party but a liability."

Mr Laski did not reply. The stalwarts on the platform looked uncommonly uncomfortable.

The chairman thereupon closed the meeting, and Newark went home to read its history books.

That, in brief, is a partial summary of what in a few days was to become known throughout Britain as " the Newark incident," " the Laski affair," " the Laski Bombshell," or just " the Newark canard." It just depended on the writer's point of view.[1]

In Newark we thought no more of it until suddenly London newspapers seized on certain points, reporters and photographers arrived in shoals, and telephone wires grew hot. The Air Vice-Marshal was hunted from meeting to meeting by interviewers, and assertion and denial, denial and accusation, flew fast as the fraternal brick-bats at a Trades Union Congress.

The candidate, who had had nothing to do with the Laski cock-fight, sedulously stuck to the steady tenor of his campaign. The only notable shots in the battle were a volley at the Common Wealth old ladies and permanent bachelors of Southwell. Southwell is a tiny cathedral city, a city of Queen Anne and Georgian houses in prim gardens, grouped neatly about a small and dignified cathedral with an Assembly Rooms to add the Trollope touch and a beamed and court-yarded old Saracen's Head to give the Pickwickian flavour. I doubt if it has much more than five thousand inhabitants.

Yet this nest of Victorian calm and ecclesiastical decorum actually harboured a covey of Common Wealth fanatics—those oddly impractical people who believe in common ownership of everything and nearly always live on incomes derived from investments built up by more industrious forbears. To certain old ladies and a few mincing gentlemen of Southwell this doctrine of Communism in kid gloves had an irresistible snob appeal. Sir Richard Acland, the Daring Dick of the movement, was said to be related to a non-blood-letting local parson, so revolutionary doctrines could not be more genteelly imbibed than in such an atmosphere of crochet and Earl

[1] It is impossible to quote Mr Laski's words in full as certain lawsuits are pending.

Grey's Mixture. Was he not a real live baronet and of "such a good family, my dear." This antimacassar school of drawing-room bloodthirstiness was severely trounced by Martin in the Assembly Rooms, while next door, in the Saracen's Head, a forthright butcher announced that he was "Tory to the teeth, and so should all right-thinking people be in Southwell."

Finally, after all the shots were fired and all the cannon had ceased smoking, we assembled in the Market Place on that fateful day of declaration to learn the destiny of England and of Newark.

Ten o'clock, they said would be the zero hour. Ten came and eleven, and the crowd grew and the rain fell. A jovial gentleman with a red face in a fierce check coat wheeled himself in an invalid chair all the way from Kelham with a large "Vote for Shephard" plastered on the back of his conveyance. "Must show my colours, y'know, even if those blasted boys do tip me into the ditch for it."

Important people walked importantly into the Town Hall. Equally important but thirstier people walked hastily into the Clinton Arms and the Saracen's Head. Glasses tinkled and healths and damnations were drunk. Still the rain fell and no news came.

Then, late in the day, the battle news trickled in. Seat after Tory seat had fallen. Harold Macmillan out. Bracken out. Geoffrey Lloyd out. Duncan Sandys capsized. Richard Law in the wilderness. Name after name rolled into the sawdust from the Socialist guillotine. Even Churchill had lost ten thousand votes to a crank who published no election address and pretended to no political policy. Could political sanity be more estranged or electoral madness be given freer rein?

"We've lost! No, you just wait and see! We'll still have a working majority."

"No, the Socialists are in! Good God, this is the end! Half Nottingham's gone Red."

"All of it, you mean! Sykes is out, and young Seely's down the drain. Is the world crazy?"

"Is Shephard in? No figures out yet. Any moment now. Hurray, young Nutting's in for Melton. Good boy!"

The wordy gale of guess and grief blew back and forth.

Then came a sudden surge of the crowd. Figures appeared on that balcony of the Town Hall where young Gladstone had received the frenzied cheers of his first electoral victory. All three candidates were there. A sonorous voice read out the figures—Shephard first with a majority of eleven hundred and sixty three (so young Tom

Bradley of Winthorpe had not been so far out after all). The Air Vice-Marshal second and looking somewhat sour. The Liberal, third and cheerful.

"Hooray! Hip! Hip! Hooray! Tallyho, Shephard!"—and young Tom Bradley, of Winthorpe, rang a Gladstone bell with a leather handle, a bell that had last been rung on Mr Gladstone's first epic day of victory.

Speeches—three of them—short, graceful, and that was that.

Then Newark went home or to the club or the pub, not to read its history books, but to ponder the future history of this newly Socialistic England.

By the morning mail the worst was known. The full blast of defeat blew bitterly on a million Tory breakfast tables. In Nottinghamshire every seat in city and county had been lost—all but Newark. The "Gateway to the North" alone stood firm. The town that had been the fief of dukes, the nursery of Gladstone, and the fortress of the Prince Bishop Alexander still flew the Tory flag above the smoke of defeat.

"I haven't felt so bad since Dunkirk," said a man as I walked into a deathlike bar at the Clinton.

"I'm taking every penny out of War Bonds. They'll pinch the lot," said another.

"What do you think, Mr Day?" asked Mr Lawrence, fingering his M.C.C. tie.

"I didn't sleep for hours," said I. "Now I think it's a blessing in disguise. Labour has promised everything and committed itself to all sorts of things. It has a panacea for all ills and a world of epidemics to come. It has an enormous majority, and nine-tenths of them don't know what responsible government means and where platform oratory ends. Their leaders are old and their problems are all young. They've got a hell of a time coming—five years of life—quite likely two, and then either hanging by their own long rope or abdication in face of the chaos they'll create.

"We've had the biggest dose of salts in our lives, and we needed it. Now we can recuperate—and take over when the Era of the Half-baked is at an end. We shall see!"

On which pompous and prophetic note I buried my nose in Mr Lawrence's tankard and prayed that sanity might return to this afflicted land before the peace is lost and trade and farming die upon the altar of the doctrinaires.

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